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*ANATOLE FRANCE*

THE MIND AND THE MAN







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THE MAN

by

LEWIS PIAGET SHANKS



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**ANATOLE FRANCE**

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## PREFATORY NOTE

THE first version of this book was a purely psychological biography of Anatole France, which was published in 1919. As it was the first detailed study treating the master of French letters, it was well received by the critics. Later, as new biographies began to appear, it quietly went out of print.

This is perhaps a perfect consummation for a book appealing to the literary public. But critics often do preserve review copies, to consult when called upon to discuss later biographers. By the irony of fate the little volume that had gone out of print was rescued from oblivion by unknown friends (may Apollo be generous to them!). One wrote that the forgotten book should have been the official biography, and another that it should immediately be brought down to date and republished.

Probably no scribbler ever found that request unreasonable. But merely to bring the book down to date was not enough: a decade of research had revealed new and important facts about the early years of the master, and his passing away had set loose the vultures that had not dared to attack him



until then. Some of them questioned even his genius; others were content to bring not marble, but mud, to build his monument. It became much harder to reconcile the works and their author—to unite in one portrait the Mind and the Man. Despite much pruning, the revised edition grew into a longer biography, largely rewritten.

Fortunately, nearly every work of Anatole France has its revelation for the close student, so there was no need to revise the story of his life's inner drama. Its motives revealed, that drama becomes much more vivid; and eight years after the master's death I feel no necessity of changing the estimate of his genius that was made eight years before. His younger contemporaries felt oppressed by that genius and had to react against it, but possibly even his bitterest enemies knew the curb of his classical form. As for the spirit of individualism and the love of freedom that animates his work, it matters little that this quality sprang largely from circumstances. What matters is his vision of the future and his clear perception of its dangers. Now that certain of his writings are being published in Russia, the world should know and ponder the whole cycle of his thought, essentially conservative.

L. PIAGET SHANKS

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## II

ANATOLE FRANCE has left us four volumes of his earliest memories. They are real memories,<sup>1</sup> however idealized: we may accept them because every page is warm with regret for an irrecoverable past. He describes his boyhood, dreamy and sensitive, turning naturally to the intellectual life that fed his imagination and centered his isolated little ego therein. Books, which for forty years were his bulwark against reality, colored his vision of life from his babyhood.

"The first idea that I got of the universe," he writes in *Pierre Nozière*, "came to me from my old pictorial Bible. It was a series of seventeenth-century woodcuts, with a Garden of Eden fresh and

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<sup>1</sup> Confirmation of this may be found in a letter of Anatole France to a man of letters, reproduced in François Carez's *Auteurs contemporains* (p. 82): "Je vous confie que tout ce qui, dans ce volume (*Le Livre de mon ami*), concerne le petit Nozière, forme un récit exact de mon enfance, sous cette réserve que mon père était non médecin mais libraire sur le quai Voltaire et que les choses domestiques étaient plus étroites et plus humbles chez nous qu'elles ne sont chez un petit médecin de quartier. Le caractère de mon père n'est pas moins conservé dans celui du docteur Nozière. Mon père est devenu un homme instruit, presque savant, à la fin de sa vie."

fertile as a Lowland landscape. In it you saw horses of Brabant, rabbits, little pigs, chickens and fat-tailed sheep. Among the animals of the Creation Eve strolled in her Flemish beauty. But her treasures were wasted upon me; I preferred the horses. . . ." Eve's beauties were not wholly lost, because they became the obsession of his long-delayed maturity.

His cosmogony was from the first egotistic, as with every child. "I held the Quai Malaquais, above which rose my room, to be the centre of the world. According to my system, . . . the earth formed a large circle around my house. Every day I would meet, coming and going in the streets, people who seemed to me occupied with a strange and amusing game, the game of life. I made up my mind that there were a great many of them, perhaps more than a hundred.

"I had not the slightest doubt that their labors, their deformities and their sufferings were a sort of amusing spectacle; I did not think that they were under absolutely fortunate influences, sheltered as I was from all anxiety. To tell the truth, I did not believe that they were as real as I was; I was not absolutely certain that they were actual people, and when from my window I saw them pass, very tiny, over the Pont des Arts, they seemed to me playthings rather than persons. . . ."

Playthings rather than persons men and women

were always to seem to him, because of his first surroundings and because of his temperament. For Anatole France was the only child of humble parents, brought up in a rich man's school—a boy so delicate, sensitive and timid that he did not master his stammering until he was forty.

His father, François-Noël Thibault, was a dealer in old books at Paris. The sixth son of a petty vine-grower and cobbler, he was born in the vineyard country near Angers, in 1805; and when his father died he had begun life, at fifteen, as a farm-helper, bound to the soil for five years. Ambition and need made him enlist in the Garde Royale of Charles X, and in the service this young peasant, who did not perhaps know how to read or write when he first became a soldier, learned enough to be promoted corporal. Then came the Revolution of 1830, which disbanded his regiment and threw him again upon his own resources.

No one knows how the untrained young veteran earned his living for the next seven years. Yet with all his handicaps he must have educated himself. In 1838 we find him working for the publisher Techener, and already in charge of a branch-store; then he became its proprietor; the necessary funds were probably secured from the rich collector whose library of books on the French Revolution he built up and catalogued—the Comte de la Bédoyère. François-Noël Thibault helps to

explain for us his gifted son, whose character was not entirely "the opposite of his father's."

Like his masters and superiors in the army, Anatole France's father was a royalist and a devout Catholic. He was a lover of the past, a conservative who hated and abominated the Revolution as deeply as he delighted in everything that belonged to the Ancien Régime. Thanks to ambition and to his choice of occupation, he finally made himself a learned antiquarian and almost a scholar; the catalogue he has left us of La Bédoyère's library is a model of erudition for its day.

Anatole France got a love of books and a *nom-de-plume* from his father. In his native Anjou the name François was always abbreviated to "France," and in the army his fellow-soldiers had called him, affectionately, "Old France." So when he turned bookseller and began to publish little notes on bibliography, he would sign them, not "Thibault," but "France, libraire." Such was the origin of the famous pseudonym: in his childhood the future writer signed his name indifferently Anatole Thibault France or simply Anatole France, after the manner of the father he adored.

François-Noël Thibault had all the proverbial gentleness of the Angevin: he is depicted for us in Sylvestre Bonnard's memories of his father, ironical, indulgent and disillusioned: "he was weary, and he loved his weariness." And the serenity of

the Anjou country, with its placid rivers and its rolling hills—*la douceur angevine*—might symbolize the literary ideal of Anatole France. Yet if he seems to incarnate this regional type in his amenity and his love of indolence, he has no less the Angevin shrewdness and irony. Every lover of Taine's theory of heredity must rejoice in the novelist's reminiscences of his maternal grandmother, a woman neither royalist nor pious, but keen-witted, practical and pagan, a woman who retained the spirit of Voltaire's times. "She had no more piety than a bird," says her grandson, "you ought to have seen the quizzical little grimaces she used to make on Sundays when Mother and I were setting out for church. . . . She clearly belonged to the eighteenth century." And even then she predicted that Anatole "would be a very different man from his father."

She was right; the child had greater gifts than patience or even distinction of intellect. He had the creative vitality, the exuberance of fancy and the imagination that alone make the artist. It seems likely that these qualities came to him from his mother, Antoinette Gallas, the affectionate and active mother whom he has so charmingly portrayed. Naïve, mystic, imaginative and candidly religious like the true daughter of Chartres that she was, she loved her son so deeply that she unwittingly delayed his growth and development.



"My mother had a charming mind, a beautiful and courageous soul and a character hard to get along with," says her son in *Le Petit Pierre*; "she would have liked me not to grow up, so as to hold me always more closely pressed against her side. And although she wished me to possess genius, she rejoiced that I was without brains, and that hers were necessary to me. Everything that offered me a little independence and freedom gave her umbrage." She exaggerated his faults and misdemeanors as she did his good qualities; she never punished him; and during the thirty-five years that Anatole France spent under her ministrations until he married, she sat up every night to await his return to the maternal roof!

It was natural that the son of these parents, isolated among adults and inspired by their ideals, should turn early to the books that he had all about him, to find in them the freedom and the sense of power that his over-guarded universe did not afford.

His universe at first was the sleepy old Quai Malaquais. There, at Number 19,<sup>1</sup> in the very heart

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<sup>1</sup> The family moved, the same year, to Number 15, where they were to remain until 1853. Then they established themselves at Number 9 Quai Voltaire, which they occupied until the retirement of Noël France. In correcting dates and names I have used the richly illustrated little book just published by Monsieur Léon Carias, which every lover of Anatole France should own. Its seventy-odd pages of text contain more facts about the master than many a longer biography.

of Old Paris, he was born, on the sixteenth of April, 1844; and from its casements his eyes had first beheld a vista of the Seine and the Louvre, the Cité and the carven towers of Notre Dame. But the universe grows with the growing legs of its children. The little world first glimpsed from his window extended, at five, from the Rue Bonaparte to the Ile Sainte-Louis, and the silver Seine, which he followed every day with his nurse or more probably his mother, revealed to him the Noah's Ark of his Bible, in the huge floating baths of La Samaritaine. To the east, beyond the Pont d'Austerlitz, he saw in imagination the mysterious realms of the Scriptures, and the Jardin des Plantes was certainly the Garden of Eden, for hadn't his mother told him that Eden was a Garden with trees and with all the animals of the Creation?

Thus his mother, convent-bred and learned in religious lore, opened to him the paths of wonder to be found in books. She used to read to him the *Lives of the Saints*, and the charm of the old stories "filled the soul of the child with wonderment and love." A dreamer already, he felt profoundly the mystic poetry of religious legend; his first hope of military glory inspired by the lead soldiers of nursery days gave way to a dream of sainthood, and he lived out the sacred stories with all the seriousness of real experience. His refusal

to eat, his distribution of coppers and toys to the poor, his attempt to make a hair shirt from the wiry cover of an old armchair, and the whipping he received from an inconsiderate maid, are related with inimitable grace and irony in the eighth chapter of *Le Livre de mon ami*; finally, "the difficulty of practising sainthood in family life" made him resolve to seek a hermitage in the Jardin des Plantes. There, on the morrow, he would live alone with all the animals of the Creation; there he would see, like Saint Anthony, the faun and the centaur, and perhaps the angels would visit him beneath the Cedar of Lebanon, on the hill where, in imagination, he saw "God the Father with his white beard and his blue robe, with arms outstretched to bless him, beside the antelope and the gazelle." But when the future author of *Thaïs* confides this plan to his mother as she combs his hair, and she asks him why he wants to be a hermit, he replies: "I want to be famous, and put on my visiting-cards 'Hermit and Saint of the Calendar.' "

Beloved as he was, he longed for glory as does every child who is sensitive enough to feel that he is only a child. But here ended the ascetic projects of young Anatole—less successful even than the boyish prank of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, who actually put a similar plan into execution. After all there were other things to in-

terest him, despite his imprisonment in the visionary life of a lonely little city boy. "It was not large, that life of mine," he tells us, "but it was a life, that is, the centre of things, the middle of the world." The very opening of his mother's closets, piled high with mysterious forbidden boxes, filled him with poetic curiosity. He loved to draw, and wondered at "the number of lines and faces that could be got out of a pencil." He confesses also his quick response to the charm of flowers, of perfumes, his joy in delicate food and his delight in the luxury of fine clothes. We shall see presently that these pleasures were not too frequent in his actual childhood, but their rareness only made them more appreciated. To be a saint by the ordinary processes would have been hard for this spoiled child, already an Epicurean.

Not a cave in the Jardin des Plantes, but a desk and a bookcase stored with books, are the proper stage and appurtenances for a future writer's seclusion. And to such things the boy turned instinctively, finding in precocious or adult activities a balm for his insignificance and a goal to guide him onward. "I lived with my books," he tells us, "my pictures, my paste-pot, my color-boxes, and all the belongings of a bright yet delicate boy, already sedentary, naïvely teaching himself by his toys that feeling for form and color, the source of so much pain and so much joy. Al-

ready I had a bent toward desk-work, a love of pictures cut out patiently by the evening lamp, a profound feeling for things pictorial. I have never needed, even in my early years, to possess things in order to enjoy them." This proves the force of that imagination by which he could even then transcend reality—then more easily than later, alas!—and in this significant page we can see the future biographer of the Maid of France.

Given such a bent by such surroundings, a boy needs only a hero to shape the rôle by which he will rise above them. According to *Le Livre de mon ami*, the hero appeared in the person of a collector—a hero of the desk and the card catalogue. Clad in flowered dressing-gown and nightcap, this worthy, immortalized under the sobriquet of Old Lebeau, passed his days cataloguing books and medals in a house packed to the roof with curiosities. So the ten-year-old Anatole, sitting spellbound in the antiquary's study, "thought it finer to make card-catalogues than to win battles. He would catalogue, and I, with eyes wide open and bated breath, would admire him. I did not imagine that there could be any finer business to give one's life to. But I was mistaken. A printer was found to print the catalogue of Old Lebeau, and then I saw my friend correcting the proofs. He would put mysterious signs on the margins of the leaves. Then I understood that this was the

finest occupation in the world, and I promised myself that I too would some day have my proof-sheets to revise."

The dressing-gown of the novelist's later years was of rich gray frieze and his cap of red or purple velvet; and the proof-sheets came in thousands, so many that the first delight he felt in them—a veritable justification of the universe—soon passed away. And we see how the antiquary he calls Lebeau, in his house piled with the flotsam of time, set the example of intellectual curiosity and scholarly zeal which even a poet and a visionary must cultivate somewhat in order to get a clear insight into the labyrinth of the past. To the impression made by Old Lebeau is possibly due the phalanx of volumes left by Anatole France; and no one need wonder who served as the model for this collector, who lives in literature through his kindness to a lonely child.

When we consider that a father is a boy's first hero, and his father's trade his first dream of his own, it seems certain that Old Lebeau was François-Noël Thibault-France, the bookseller and bibliographer of the Quai Malaquais. The card catalogue is certainly the one Noël France made of the Comte de la Bédoyère's collection; that worthy probably provided a few traits for the portrait, as did Paul Lacroix and other collectors who frequented the bookshop where the boy

"played with dumpy duodecimos as with dolls." But these encounters he owed to his father and to the quiet back shop with its circle of armchairs; Noël France kept one of the last bookstores "in which there was conversation."

In this shop Anatole France grew up, surrounded by the motley ranks of an ever-changing library. Here he got his first notions of history and society, from books and from the wealthy collectors enthroned in their august circle; here he learned from his father's example the obsequiousness which, according to Gyp the novelist and others who first knew him, characterized his manners until he had himself gained literary royalty. And as the patrons of his father were mostly royalists, *ci-devant* aristocrats and conservatives, their remarks on the Revolution gave him his lifelong hatred for that event, which destroyed forever the epicurean society in which he would have liked to live. It is easy to imagine them—some of the older ones wearing the high neckcloths and tight strapped trousers that Daumier loved to draw, arguing, discussing, unmindful of the shy little lad reading in the corner or tying up a package of books on the counter; but it was for him that they talked, after all. Disciples of Voltaire, they were the first to show him, in their wrangles over Napoleon, their comments on the

Revolution and the futility of political changes, the multiplicity of truth.

Other revelations came to him in those fateful early years—revelations of equal importance to the future writer. There was his lovely godmother Marcelle, who brought him a set of dumbbells to develop his puny muscles, and who left with him forever, to dazzle his young imagination, a vision of the loveliness of Woman. There was the poor neighbor who committed suicide by jumping from his attic window, and, a little later, the dead grandmother he was taken to see and commanded to kiss farewell. The earlier kiss of the golden-eyed Marcelle found its complement in that glacial contact; he was then initiated into the two mysteries which inspire all literature: the beauty that is woman and the tragic mystery of death.

Such revelations were more important for him than the beginnings of his formal education. In *Le Livre de mon ami* we have a ludicrous picture of his first schooldays, spent in a "highly recommended" establishment of the fashionable Faubourg Saint-Germain. There, in a room full of mischief-loving youngsters presided over by an absent-minded spinster, he made acquaintance with the world of human society and found his first friend in the typical young Parisian Fontanet. There too the charms of poetry were revealed



to him; when the melancholy schoolmistress read to the class her melancholy ballad, *Pauvre Jeanne*, young Anatole wept at the recital.

It was possibly due to this poetic example that before the boy was eight he addressed to his parents, on the first of January, 1852, four quatrains of verse, in which deep filial love finds expression in a poem whose obvious sincerity makes up for its childish platitudes. Later in this very year, he wrote out for his mother a little book, labeled on its carefully printed title-page "*Nouvelles pensées et maximes chrétiennes*, 1852, *prix 50 centimes*." The manuscript, which the young author intends to print "when he is twenty," ends with these words: "My dear friends, live in accordance with these thoughts, and you will go to Heaven," and is full of warnings against the Devil who lies in wait to tempt us all. Needless to say, this book was never printed: at twenty the young man had different ideas about such matters.

We are too apt to forget that the education of Anatole France was that given the son of any Catholic family, in his day and generation. At the age of nine he was sent to the Institution Sainte-Marie, then he continued his studies in the Collège Stanislas, near the Luxembourg Gardens, an aristocratic school directed by clerics, and rather expensive, one infers, for the son of an

humble bookseller. At Stanislas, "un vieux collègue un peu monacal," he came under the instruction of ecclesiastics and learned the poetry that ritual and legend inspire. He went every Saturday to confession. Æsthetically the priesthood may well have had its moment of attraction for him; the vocation felt by young Piedagnel in his novel *L'Orme du mail*, and the episode which fills that hero with a lifelong hatred of the Church, are too vividly related not to have some autobiographic value.

For Stanislas with its compulsions helped to set him against the Church, no less than the rather conventional father against whose character, ideas and piety he rebelled in his 'teens. When he came to hate his school, with its dreary pedants, its sordid promiscuities and its traditional theology, the adolescent could turn against the clerics the logic he had learned from them. Like Ernest Renan, like his contemporary Jules Lemaître, he got from the Church the only weapons that make an adversary of religion formidable. "In the Temple," observed Anatole France in *Histoire contemporaine*, "were forged the hammers that destroyed the Temple."

At aristocratic Stanislas the bookseller's son first came in contact with a world socially far above him. Naturally he says nothing of this in his official

books of childish memories, although he has admitted that these books embellished the household circumstances of his infancy. But in his realistic novel, *Les Désirs de Jean Servien*, we get a detailed picture which hints of the other side of his very modest home life, a picture full of things that his delicate senses could not have failed to perceive after he had seen the homes of richer comrades.

The parallels in *Les Désirs de Jean Servien* prove that the novel is a pessimistic confession. Not a direct confession, for it is written in the third person and strives to attain the cold objective manner of Flaubert. But it is a story of a bookbinder's son, whose father and mother are clearly the father and mother of Anatole France, placed in more sordid surroundings. These parents are ambitious to give their boy the advantages they never enjoyed. So Jean is put in a fine school "near the Luxembourg"; he makes his first communion expecting, like Piedagnel, some miracle of emotion, is disillusioned and loses his fervor for the Church.

After these confirmatory details we read of Jean's first visit to the home of a schoolmate. In their richly furnished apartment the child of the people comes in contact with Parisian luxury; there he meets in the person of his friend's mother

"a woman too different from those who had come under his notice until then for him to be able to conceive her nature, her beauty or her age." And when she asks him what his father's trade is, he blushes when obliged to confess the truth.

"At that second," the story tells us, "he would have consented not to see his father, whom he loved, again, if at that price he could have been accepted as the son of a captain of a frigate or of a secretary of an embassy. He was ashamed, as if he had confessed an unseemly thing. . . .

"Returning to his lodgings, he perceived for the first time an odor of paste which seemed to him intolerable. The bedroom in which he had long slept happy and beloved appeared poverty-stricken to him. . . . In the next room he heard his father snoring. He imagined him at his bench, with his serge apron . . . and for the second time in twelve hours, he blushed for his father."—Thus runs the novel *Jean Servien*.

Old bookstores also have their paste-pots, and vile odors on rainy days. The visit which, in the story, spoiled life for the bookbinder's child is too vividly related not to have reflected some actual emotion felt by the bookseller's son. "He had glimpsed a whole world that he knew was forever closed to him and toward which all the forces of his young nature drew him irresistibly." This

unhappiness and this envy, even if momentary, could only send the future novelist oftener to books. It could not fail to fan his ambition for literary glory, the only gateway of flight from a future of bookselling.

So Anatole France grew up, one who found his refuge in the past, a student and a dreamer, nurtured by the inestimable influence of Paris. To such a boy, responsive to the pictorial, to the charm of the past, the chance of living in the City of Light was a veritable godsend. "It does not seem to me possible," he modestly affirms, "for a man to have an absolutely commonplace turn of mind, if he has been brought up on the quays of Paris, opposite the Louvre and the Tuileries, and facing the glorious Seine, which runs amidst the belfries and towers and spires of Old Paris. . . . There, the bookstalls, the curiosity shops and the old print stores display the most beautiful products of art and the most interesting tokens of the past. Every shop-window is an attraction for the eyes and the intellect: the passer-by who knows how to see always carries away some thought, as a bird flies off with a bit of straw for its nest."

When the future master was still a boy, some eighty years ago, this quarter was even richer in atmosphere than it is today. Old prints, old paintings, old books, old furniture—every shop of the

quays was full of them. Carved credence-tables, flowered Japanese vases, bits of enamel, faïence, brocaded stuffs and figured tapestries served to illustrate the incunabula lying so invitingly open: the famous curiosity shop described in Balzac's *La Peau de chagrin* shows what these places used to be. This larger school of history Anatole France knew before he ceased to wear short trousers and embroidered collars, strolling about Paris with his godfather's son Etienne Charavay: "When we went to the Tuileries Gardens on holidays, we used to pass along this erudite Quay Voltaire, and as we walked, hoop in hand and ball in pocket, we used to look into the shop-windows just like the old gentlemen, and form our own ideas on all these strange things which had come down from the past, from the mysterious past."

Nor was this education confined to holidays. There were also his daily journeys to the Collège Stanislas, situated in the Rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs. Every day he traversed a humble quarter of the capital, with all its multifarious life: the streets gave him his first understanding of the world and his timorous but lifelong sympathy for the masses. In the streets he saw the milkwomen, the water-carriers, the coal-heavers at their tasks; he saw their cheerful labor the length of every alley; he watched them resting and talking in the Luxem-

bourg Gardens under the statues. Like Coppée, he loved this aspect of the city, though he loved it as a spectator. It was a part of his vision of the universe, a poet's vision, destined to be engraved in pages expressive as a Whistler etching, pages discreetly evocative of the Paris we love.

He learned in fine that busy idling which distinguishes the artist from the scholar. All through his adolescence he retained the dreamy wonder of childhood: his father called him an "enfant endormi." Even at school he was inattentive and careless, except when aroused by his quick sense of humor. He would omit words and whole sentences in his written translations; he rarely finished the work assigned. "Slothfulness and time-wasting" is the summary of one teacher, on a school-record still in existence. "He snickers all the time, a fly will distract him; lessons badly learned, one composition not done, work to be done tomorrow." At the age of twelve he has to translate six chapters of his Latin reader for throwing paper-wads in class. Once he is noted as having attained the foot of his class, "he is the twenty-sixth out of twenty-six. It is a shame, he can do well."

Yet dreamy and mischievous as he was, he found in the humanities a fundamental inspiration. "You may call me an aristocrat or a mandarin, but I believe that six or seven years of literary culture give to the mind prepared to receive it a nobility, a

force and a beauty which is not to be obtained by other means."

At Stanislas he received this literary training, and responded to it from the very beginning. When his old Jesuit Latin master read the sentence: "The remnants of the Roman army reached Canusium through the favor of the night," he would see "passing silently in the moonlight, over the naked plain and the long road flanked with tombs, livid faces, foul with blood and dust, battered helmets, wrenched and tarnished breastplates, broken swords." While still parsing Livy, Anatole France was old enough to feel the grandeur that was Rome.

"Then it was Virgil, and then Homer. I saw Thetis rising like a white cloud from the sea, I saw Nausicaä and her companions, and the palm-tree of Delos, and the sky and the earth and the ocean, and the tearful smile of Andromache. . . . And I understood it, felt it. For six months I could not shut my *Odyssey*. It brought me many punishments. But what did pages to copy after school matter to me? I was with Ulysses on the wine-dark sea! Then I discovered the tragic poets. . . . Sophocles, Euripides opened to me the enchanted world of heroes and heroines and initiated me into the poetry of woe. *Alcestis* and *Antigone* gave me the noblest dreams that ever boy did dream. Bent over my dictionary, above my ink-bespattered desk, I would behold divine figures, arms of ivory droop-



ing over white tunics, and hear voices sweeter than the sweetest music, lamenting in harmony."

It was thus that the idler and the dreamer learned how to forget the sordid details of life in a French boarding school.

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THOSE memories are too vivid to reflect dreams drawn from books alone. No, it was not Euripides who first inspired his love for Greek tragedy, but a fair interpreter of that poet. At seventeen he had fallen in love with an actress, across the footlights.

One evening at the Théâtre Français he had seen the dark eyes and slim bare arms of Elise-Pierrette Devoyod, clad in the white robe of a classical heroine. The hopeless passion born of that vision was destined to endure four years. All day long the timid adolescent dreamed of her; alone in his room he spent his leisure hours reading the lines she had declaimed; he learned by heart page after page of Racine and found in that reading the finest quality of his style. To this divinity he wrote many poems, which he never destroyed; but in his books he left no trace of her passage through his life, unless he remembered her name when he called himself Petit Pierre.

Elise-Pierrette Devoyod was born about 1838, and got her training from Régnier at the Con-

servatoire. She obtained second honors there in 1856, was engaged by the Odéon and, in 1859, by the Théâtre Français. Very beautiful, if not a great emotional actress, she had for years played the rôle of princess in the classical repertory. She was about twenty-three years old when, costumed as Emilie in Corneille's drama *Cinna*, she invaded the dreams of Anatole France, then seventeen. How she transformed all his desires he has related, vicariously, in *Les Désirs de Jean Servien*:

"Then he saw, in a Roman palace, standing with her elbows upon the back of an antique chair, a woman who wore over her white wool robe a saffron-colored palla. Amid the sound of footfalls, of gowns and little benches, she was reciting a long monologue, and was making slow gestures. As he saw her he felt an unknown joy, which little by little became acute and almost painful. The succession of scenes brought upon the stage a *confidente*, then a hero, then other actresses, but he perceived only the one who had first appeared. His glances were fixed hungrily upon her; they caressed her bare arms . . . they plunged into her brown hair . . . they pressed close against those moving lips. . . . He wanted to feel, to grasp and to hold that lovely living thing which was offered to his gaze as a spectacle; he enwrapped her, embraced her with his eyes."

The entr'acte interrupted this voluptuous rev-

erie; then the curtain rose upon the second act of the drama in verse. "Fortunately, the beautiful figure in the white robe appeared again. But he was watching her too closely. . . . He was dazzled; his moist eyes closed and he heard only the loud beating of his temples. By a great effort in the final scene, he beheld her again and heard her, clearly and definitely and yet not like a human being, for she took on for him the simplicity of a supernatural vision. And when at the signal of the bell the curtain rolled down for the last time, he felt the sensation of an irreparable collapse."

Returning home at midnight through the black streets, Jean prolongs his obsession by taking the longest way; and when he awakes the next morning, happy, but conscious of a curious "lack of something," opens his Corneille to read over the verses she had recited. "All day long, in the back of the shop, where the smell of strong glue mingled with the odor of cabbage soup, he lived in a glow of incomparable splendor. His little book, scored with his thumb-nail at the couplets of Emilie,<sup>1</sup> sufficed to maintain him in the loveliest of illusions. An image of her and those sounds made up the world for him."

But desire intrudes into Jean's dream paradise, the next time he watches his idol play. Love be-

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<sup>1</sup> Mademoiselle Devoyod excelled in this rôle.

comes a torture. One night he waits at the stage door to see her come forth, his heart bursting within him. He visits the exposition, gazes at the jewels discovered in the tomb of an Egyptian queen, and imagines them adorning her living beauty. Another evening he finds relief in seeking her house and kissing the carriage door, an incident which he puts into verse and sends her. And every night that his goddess plays he returns to the theater, taking money for his ticket from his father's cash-drawer.

"Turn by turn, he saw her with forehead bound by the white band of the virgins of Hellas . . . then in a flounced robe, with powdered curls upon her bare shoulders . . . then wearing upon her head a golden hawk's wings . . . and clad with the inhuman splendor of an Oriental queen; then under the black hood and sombre velvet robe of a royal widow . . . then finally (and it was thus that he found her most desirable) in a modern riding habit, moulded from shoulder to heel in a tight cloth robe. . . . In order to pass his life in these worlds of poetry, he read Racine, the Greek tragedians, Corneille, Shakespeare . . . and everything in modern literature that seemed to him elegant or passionate. And in all these works he saw but one image. . . ."

One image! But on the stage, Jean Servien preferred her in a riding habit. And the reason is evi-

dent, when we consider that Anatole France lived his dream life as her lover in the dramas she played, and that he certainly longed to taste the pleasures and the sports of that gay Parisian society from which his birth and fortune excluded him.

Jean Servien, like his creator when he fell in love with the fair Elise, is only seventeen, and so timid that after following her home one day and kissing her hand at the gate, he does not dare pursue a manifest advantage. And his bondage continues: disregarding a friend's advice to renounce the love he had got from books and choose instead a humble mistress, he scorns the advances of a pretty grisette; he flunks his examinations, fails as a monitor in the school where he obtains a place, fails again in his attempts to put his dreams into literary form—a chapter which is unmistakably autobiographical. Finally this hero of frustration perishes in a street riot of the Commune, having discovered that his idol is the kept mistress of an old bourgeois.

*Les Désirs de Jean Servien* is the story of its author's youth, written pessimistically and with a tragic ending. His verses to Elise Devoyod still exist; like Jean, he too was so timid that the presence of a pretty woman literally "paralyzed all his faculties"; he flunked several examinations before he passed at twenty the "baccalaureate" which most French boys win at seventeen. He too, after

graduation, could neither find a place nor put his dreams on paper, and he too taught for a short time in the Latin Quarter.

As for the sordid atmosphere of the story, that came from Stanislas; Stanislas enabled Anatole France to depict Jean's disgust for his home life. "Everything at school," he confesses in *La Vie en fleur*, his last book of memories, "made study hateful and life unbearable. . . . But what perhaps made me most unhappy was the horrible mixture of chalk and ink which rendered the class-room an abominable place to me. And in winter, when the iron stove grew red-hot and gave off its heavy stench, all my senses were offended, and it was through moments of cruel nausea, that I caught a glimpse of beauty or of glory, of Cassandra lifting her blazing eyes to the heavens, or of the triumph of Paulus Æmilius. So I had to repeat my studies later, as best I could."<sup>1</sup>

To repeat a subject, one must have learned to

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<sup>1</sup>These disagreeable conditions, no less than the torments of a cerebral love, explain his few prizes at school. In his first years there he had had a second award in religion (!) and one in Latin composition; at fourteen he got a second prize for drawing. Living opposite the Louvre as he did, he early learned to love the treasures he went to look at nearly every day; he read Winckelmann and admired the classic lines of Poussin and Ingres and the white purity of the Greek marbles. But the only other significant prize won by the future novelist was a second award in French narration. Perhaps the Latin prize is significant too, for even in those days his diary reveals a pedantic love of Latin quotations which never left him.

love it, and this was true for the future author of *Thaïs*. Virgil won him over from the beginning, so thoroughly that he translated for his mother a part of the first eclogue. After he had fallen in love, it was Virgil he took with him on his summer vacation in Normandy, when he discovered the sea, the mysterious ocean which, for every humanist, still remembers the lost galleys that cleft its waves two thousand years ago; along the Norman coast he dreamed away a summer filled with vague desires, and it was there, on the cliffs alone with the *Æneid*, that Anatole France probed and deepened the wound in his heart by reading the love story of the hapless Carthaginian queen.

In fact, the second book of Virgil impressed him so profoundly that later he wrote a poem on a similar subject, *Le Bûcher de santal*; and even at eighty he would often quote the lines beginning "Hic quos durus amor" as the most beautiful of all those written by the Roman poet. He found them beautiful because at twenty they had given expression to his suffering. But though he was "very unhappy," Dido's fate was not to be his; her story merely glorified a memory and became a memory, canorous and haunting. Thus his love for the actress made the classics real for him, real and full of color.

Through history too he rose above his school life: he delighted in the past and found in it a



substitute for the present. When a mere child he began to collect the works of Guizot. Being allowed to open the packages of books that came into his father's shop, he surreptitiously added many volumes of history to his bookshelves. He hung on the words of the historians who frequented the paternal book-mart and academy; vacation letters written from Normandy laud their talents or inquire after their health. At Granville, the island of Jersey and elsewhere, he bought books in order to learn about the ruins, and many of his letters home are little historical essays. The results of this interest were school essays on Guttenberg and Leo X which in 1859 were deemed worthy of a place in the archives of Stanislas. Four later compositions of his were similarly honored: one was a meditation on the ruins of Palmyra; another was *La Légende de Sainte-Radegonde*, which his proud father had copied by a calligrapher in a pamphlet now prized as the first work of Anatole France.

This interest in history was fostered by the boy's godfather Charavay, who was directing his own son toward the same field.<sup>1</sup>

The elder Charavay was also a bookseller, a friend of Anatole's father, who had edited books with him. Their sons were friends from childhood.

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<sup>1</sup> Charavay is depicted in *La Vie en Fleur* as Monsieur Danquin.

Etienne Charavay, four years younger than Anatole France, also went to Stanislas, where despite his age he took his baccalaureate the same year as his comrade. Possibly this boy was the bold and clever Fontanet of *Le Livre de mon ami*, for at fourteen he claimed, in a naïve letter, that he was as tall as his puny schoolmate at eighteen. And like Fontanet and Pierre, the two comrades roamed the streets of Paris whenever they could escape from surveillance; together they visited humbler booksellers to fill orders that came to their fathers' shops, or searched the book-boxes of the quays, hoping to discover in them some forgotten treasure. Together they admired the actress Madeleine Brohan, and wrote verses in praise of her genius, a year after they had left Stanislas.

Etienne Charavay was then a pupil of the Ecole des Chartes, where he was preparing himself for his career—a long apprenticeship, because his father died and he had to take charge of the shop. He did not, however, leave school, and until 1869, when he obtained his diploma as archivist-paleographer, Anatole France often went to seek his comrade there, after school hours. But he was never enrolled in the institution; his only graduate school of history was Etienne Charavay.

It was Charavay who, as editor of the *Amateur d'autographes*, induced his friend to write for that

periodical his first book reviews.<sup>1</sup> Charavay thus helped to solve for him the question of a career. After leaving Stanislas at eighteen Anatole France had hesitated; for a year he had helped his father edit book catalogues,<sup>2</sup> but his dreams were all of literature: he wished only to become a poet. When he had attained his majority his family allowed him to indulge this fancy; for a while he possessed a room of his own near the Panthéon, where he wrote and studied and knew the love of an actress much older than he. But after a year we find him again under the parental roof, where his mother nightly sat awaiting his return. He wanted a post that would give him freedom again.

So all the hatred he felt toward Napoleon III—a hatred amply proved by his book reviews—did not keep him from seeking a place as a government *employé*. Probably he was urged to do this by his father, who was somewhat worried over the future of the “sleepy” young man whom school and home had alike unfitted for a strenuous life. However that may be, the son applied in 1866 for a post in

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<sup>1</sup> These reviews disclose, even then, his love for antiquity, his hatred of Christianity and the Middle Ages, his delight in Rabelais and Molière, and his decided preference for the pagan eighteenth century, whose light and lovely ladies he was always to admire.

<sup>2</sup> He is said to have helped to edit the catalogue of La Bédoyère's library, published when he was eighteen. Browsing over these volumes, he certainly found many a page that was to bear fruit in *Les Dieux ont soif*.

the Library of the Senate. But despite the recommendations of his father's influential friends, the authorities did not hasten to make the appointment; the petitioner was thirty-two years old before he got his sinecure in the old palace of the Luxembourg, where Leconte de Lisle had found a refuge and leisure to write. The bookseller and his wife were so eager to lift their child above their own social status that they were quite willing to let him wait until this opportunity should occur.

In the meantime Anatole France remained at home. Minor editorial tasks were given him by the firms of Bachelin-Deflorenne and the great house of Larousse: France was one of the compilers of the vast dictionary. He wrote prefaces for Lemerre. In such ways he earned from a hundred to a hundred and fifty francs a month for spending money. And he evidently did not spend it all on books: on one pay day he happened to meet Catulle Mendès, and a luncheon and dinner and evening at the café consumed the whole amount. This desultory existence, full of hours of fruitful idleness, was far pleasanter than the teaching which he had endured for a season in a tutoring school. But even that experience was not wholly unfortunate: he made a close friend of Paul Bourget who was also employed there, and the two comrades could forget their prison-life conversing in the Luxembourg Garden, toward evening.

All these years Anatole France continued to write verses. We remember that he began to versify at seven; at twenty he had attained such mastery that he palmed off certain lines of his own as a newly discovered fragment of the poet Chénier, guillotined in 1793. Great technical facility is also shown in the lyrics written during the same year to his actress-divinity, Elise Devoyod. Admittedly, there are many remembered phrases from the great French poets in these verses, judging from published extracts. But they prove the depth of a boyish passion. Four long years, he confesses at twenty-one, he has lived only by seeing this actress and thinking of her; her image smiles at him above the pages of his *Œdipus Rex*, it hovers over the poems of Lord Byron. She is his "goddess," his "sacred Muse," wearing "the mask of antiquity." Like his hero Jean Servien, he has seen her walking with a child; like Jean again he has left a kiss upon her hand despite her protesting cry—"the cry of a wounded dove."

Like his hero, too, Anatole France doubtless burned most of his early writings. Only one other manuscript is known: this contains three scenes of a violently Romantic drama, called *Sir Punch*. Sir Punch is a Falstaffian Lovelace and a jovial scoundrel, and his exploits recall the truculent plays dear to the public of 1840, the melodramas of Hugo and of Dumas *père*. Punch boastfully relates

all his seductions to his spouse, while she in her turn leads on Don Juan so that her husband may rob him. Adolescence clearly brought its reaction to the boy cooped up in the old bookshop—a satiric reaction. He was, however, now attending lectures at the Sorbonne; he was feeding his frustration on Renan's tranquil skepticism, and in his room over the bookstore he was reveling in the works of that master of disillusion, Montaigne. All these joys of disenchantment matured him, no less than life itself; when, in pursuit of books wanted by clients, he searched the dusty boxes of the quays, the mood of ironic revolt shadowed in *Sir Punch* collapsed and his soul became the mirror of a skeptic's world.

“O sordid old Jews, O candid booksellers of the quays, my masters, what gratitude I owe you! More than the professors at the University, you gave me my intellectual education. You spread before my delighted eyes the mysterious shapes of life in the past, and every sort of precious monument of man's thinking. 'Twas by ferreting in your book-boxes, by gazing at your dusty hoards, laden with the wretched relics of our forefathers and with their beautiful thoughts . . . that I acquired, boy that I was, a profound consciousness of the passing of things and the nothingness of it all. . . .”

And though this disillusion went into his verses,

yet Art offered an escape; he was not a wholly disillusioned young man when, eager to meet Leconte de Lisle and hear his talks on poetry, he was admitted in 1867 to the noisy sessions of the Parnassian poets. These writers formed the newest literary school; they used to meet in the back shop of their publisher Lemerre, where their radical theories of verse were explained and defended. Romantic lyricists had confessed themselves in verse until they now bored even each other; all must be renounced except those who had exercised some restraint. Self-repression—the symbol of Vigny's *La Mort du loup*—must supplant this washing of spiritual garments; Gautier and Baudelaire had revealed the plastic, picturesque, almost metallic style which alone could paint their impersonal vision of the world. A reaction from a debauch of romantic feeling created a new poetic theory, and as Leconte de Lisle had now published *Les Poèmes antiques* and *Les Poèmes barbares*, the word had twice become flesh. Splendid, barbaric, passionately impassive, a new poetic realism was born, vivid as the prose of *Salammbô* and destined to rule French literature until the Symbolists came.

In 1867 realism was the dominant mood of all the arts. It was the child of science, this rejection of the personal element in creation—child of the great movement that swept over Europe after the

middle of the nineteenth century. Darwin's *Origin of Species*, translated into French in 1862, had been followed by Claude Bernard's *Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale*. Darwinism and determinism had become the watchwords of the times. Taine had published the Preface to his *Histoire de la littérature anglaise*, in which he defined genius itself as a mere product of the race, the moment and the milieu. How could poetry escape the movement now spreading from philosophy to all the arts?

Poetry, however, must find an æsthetic basis for fatalism, or be paralyzed by its fetters. Hence it was that Leconte de Lisle had turned to India, to discover in the philosophy of the Hindus the secret of a fatalism at once scientific and fervidly religious. If science had done away with a personal God, the poet-dreamer might still invoke the Goddess of Illusion and find in her his consolation:

L'invisible Maya, créatrice du monde,  
Espoir et souvenir, le rêve et la raison,  
L'unique, l'éternelle et la sainte Illusion.<sup>1</sup>

So, following the author of *Les Poèmes antiques*, Anatole France espoused Illusion in his turn, poetizing the philosophy his soul of reverie had

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<sup>1</sup> "Goddess invisible, who made the world,  
Hope, memory, our reason and our dream,  
Illusion, single, everlasting, holy."



learned from the dusty volumes spread out along the parapets of the Seine.<sup>1</sup>

Thus the year 1867 found the young man a Parnassian in the bud, slowly preparing his first volume of verse. And being, like all the Parnassians, interested in their great precursor Alfred de Vigny, he undertook at the same time a biographical study of that poet, whose posthumous journal had just appeared. This study, for which Anatole France readily found a publisher in 1868, is a careful but rather immature appreciation of Vigny; it contains nothing for us, except the author's very personal assertion that the whole originality of genius consists in the art of putting together what it takes from others!

Two years later came the war of 1870, and the student of mosaic had to play the sedulous ape to

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<sup>1</sup> Six more years were to pass before his verses grew into a book; until 1873 he published them only in ephemeral reviews. Some went into *La Gazette rimée*, printed by Lemerre in support of the new school of verse—a periodical on which Anatole France collaborated together with Paul Verlaine. In June, 1867, it printed two of France's poems, *Denys de Syracuse* and *Les Légions de Varus*—poems which criticized Napoleon the Little, as Hugo had called the Emperor, and which had some part in suppression of the young review. Years before, when he wrote articles on bibliography aided by his father, France had also contributed to bibliographical journals. In 1866 he had been editor of *Le Chasseur bibliographique*, wrote criticisms of his own, and even printed his poems in it: one of them presents the conflict of paganism and Christianity in the Alexandrian age, and its heroine is Thaïs. *Le Chasseur bibliographique* had also a very short existence.

Mars. Though declared unfit for military service because of "weakness of constitution," he was conscripted in the militia, the "home-guard." He served on the fortifications of Paris, and during his occasional duties there did not forget the Muses, even when Paris was besieged. His pocket Virgil went with him to the "front," and he tells how he and a comrade read one of the eclogues as they lay on the grass, while the Prussians were attacking the fortress of La Faisanderie, and their cannon-balls dropped hissing into the Marne. But when the capital fell and the Communists tried to enroll him in their ranks, the future radical escaped from the city, soon to be bombarded and set on fire. Not till June, 1871, was Anatole France able to return to his parents who had remained in Paris, and resume his writing.

Two years later his volume appeared, bearing the title *Les Poèmes dorés*. Great poetry it is not, but it is good verse, luminous and well wrought. The first poem, an ode to Light, gives the keynote of the book, a sunny neo-Greek pantheism, serenely fatalistic, and thoroughly epicurean despite its mysticism. Such are the veils that poetry adopts, when forced to drape for us the cold truths of science. Darwin only awakens a forgotten pantheism, and Anatole France, like Swinburne across the Channel, celebrates in the fullness of youth a pagan hymn to life. Vowed to impersonality, the young

"veteran" of 1870 sings of war only as the eternal conflict in the animal world; and the fate of the dying stag or dragon fly, like the dim instinct of trees or the longing of flower for flower, is but a note in his hymn to life, life and that Eros which for Darwin, as for Epicurus, builds without ceasing this world of fact or dream:

L'Amour, l'Amour puissant, la Volupté féconde,  
Voilà le dieu qui crée incessamment le monde,  
Le père de la vie et des destins futurs!  
C'est par l'Amour fatal, par ses luttes cruelles,  
Que l'univers s'anime en des formes plus belles,  
S'achève et se connaît en des esprits plus purs.<sup>1</sup>

The volume was dedicated to Leconte de Lisle, but nowhere in it will be found the midday glory of *Les Poèmes barbares*. Nor does the disciple catch the austere religious fervor of his master. No Buddhist renunciation gives lyric fire to these verses; the thought of death only inspires in him a deeper love of life. His pictures often recall Gautier's, but they are far slighter; it was not until three years later, in 1876, when Anatole France had reached his thirties and was hoping soon to settle down in

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<sup>1</sup> " 'Tis Love the god, and Love's delight  
That builds the world incessantly,  
—Father of Life, and Destiny—  
All Beauty owns his secret might;  
Grows the world fairer in our sight?  
Completer, richer, conscious of  
Itself in clearer minds?—Praise Love  
And all his conflicts infinite."

the Senate Library, like a living Sylvestre Bonnard, that he gave us his finest verse in the exquisite story of *Les Noces corinthiennes*.

*Les Noces corinthiennes* is a dream of Greece set to the measures of Racine. This drama in Alexandrines is not merely his monument to the land which first revealed to him the vision of beauty; it is his first historical miniature, more delicately etched than *Thaïs*. Here is presented the Greek view of life, calm and sane and undisturbed by any sense of the infinite:

. . . La vie est bonne

Car c'est un grand Démon, ami, qui nous la donne.  
L'enfant jette en jouant les osselets et rit,  
Le jeune homme au sang vif médite en son esprit  
De rencontrer, le soir, la vierge sous les saules.  
Le blanc vieillard dont l'âge a courbé les épaules,  
Assis au banc du seuil, sous les astres en chœur  
A parler sagement réjouit son cher cœur.  
Au long des jours de miel et des heures amères,  
Suis doucement le fil que te tournent les Moeres.  
L'homme aux ardents désirs, quand l'Hadès l'a vaincu,  
A désiré de vivre et n'a jamais vécu.  
Craignons les vains souhaits et l'attente chagrine.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> ". . . Life's good, I know,  
For 'tis a gift a Dæmon doth bestow.  
The child laughs o'er the toys he throws in play,  
The youth, hot-blooded, plans at close of day  
To meet the maiden underneath the trees.  
The greybeard with his shoulders bent and old,  
Sits by the threshold, 'neath the stars of gold,  
And cheers his heart with wise discourse, at ease.  
Through mornings honey-sweet and bitter eves,

Thus speaks the father of the heroine to her lover Hippias. But the mother of Daphne is a Christian convert, burning with zeal for the new faith. Sick of an unknown malady and eager to secure health for good works, she consecrates her unwilling daughter to Christ, invoking God's vengeance upon herself if Daphne fail to pay her vow. So the girl casts her ring into the fountain of the nymphs, crying:

"Rejouis-toi, Dieu triste à qui plaît la souffrance!"

But Hippias soon returns from his voyage to wed, and Daphne, leaving her room to pay a last midnight visit to the home she must leave, finds her lover sleeping on a lion skin in the hall. He wakes, and pleads with her until her heart and flesh belie her promise:

"C'est Eros qui le veut: il faut suivre sa loi."

Then the law of Eros, so obsessing to the author in his own seclusion, becomes the law of tragic fatality. The Greek mother intervenes, but Daphne meets her lover in a pagan tomb. "They have lived at least, and their ashes are at rest." There she prepares the poison, mingles it with the sacrificial wine of the wedding-feast, and, resolved to betray

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Follow the clue the fatal Triad weaves.  
He who desires too much, if death befall,  
Has hoped to live and never lived at all.  
Avoid delays that vex and vain desires."

neither God nor her lover, dies a martyr to love, a Greek Juliet or Atala.

This is in brief the plot of *Les Noces corinthiennes*, adapted from Goethe's *Bride of Corinth*. A personal confession lies beneath its objectivity. "They have lived at least" is very significant, and Hippias' diatribe against Christianity expresses a hatred of religion learned under the masters of Stanislas.

In the drama, as in the author's life, the pagan ideal finds its foil in the zeal of the early Christians; one sees how the dreams of his childhood, the Bible stories read at his mother's knee, made it easy for him to relive the age of faith he describes. For a moment this vision provided an escape. In the Preface is found his real attitude: he knows that "there is nothing certain outside the realm of science," but he also knows how unscientific it is to think that science can replace religion. "As long as man is suckled at a woman's breast, he will be consecrated in the temple and initiated into some mystery of the divine. He will have his dream. And what matter if the dream be false, provided it is fair? Is it not the destiny of man to be sunk in an everlasting illusion? And is not this illusion the very condition of life?"

This is Anatole France at thirty-two. At sixty-two he asserted the same view of human existence, but more brutally.



### 3

LIKE Hippias in *Les Noces corinthiennes*, Anatole France had reasons to hate religion and priests. He hated priests because they had been his professors, and had not fitted him for a living in a world of men. What the future master was at twenty-three can be seen in the portrait by his friend, Fernand Calmettes:

“In his desire to please at all costs, young France would open his eyes till they popped out of his head, . . . like one spying; he would talk with one hand under his chin, moving his palm as if to keep the words from falling, and people said that he served his compliments on a plate. He lisped, hunted a long time for his words, so worried was he about making his thoughts precise. . . . From the education he had received among the priests of Stanislas and from his relations with young men trained in fine manners he had got habits of moving his body forward and smiling set smiles which were declared obsequious. This show of ceremony which did not suit his temperament fond of fancy and un-

constraint . . . this studied appearance which he was so slow to throw off, falsified his personality and made men wrongly ascribe to him crafty intentions which were far from his natural self."

The bookseller's son had cause to hate clerics. They had increased his natural timidity; all that they had done for him was to point out, unwittingly, the road by which he could rise above it. Reading the classics or memorizing Racine, he had learned to walk that path of mastery, with eyes fixed upon a vision of elegance and dignity which patient effort must surely attain. His inferiority complex thus modeled the very measures of his compassed sentences. His graces were "painfully learned," as Brunetière averred, but they were learned, and largely by his fifteen years of versifying.

To begin one's career with a book of verse is not rare among French authors, trained in classical metrics at school. Young writers cultivate Euterpe before they wed the pedestrian muse of prose, and their prose is all the richer for secrets of color and rhythm they have learned from their earlier devotion. Maupassant, Bourget, Daudet and Richepin began as poets; Maeterlinck and Rostand wrote lyrics before they took up the drama, and none of them found that their apprenticeship to meter was wasted time. But this singing



season, usually ended at twenty-five, lasted much longer for Anatole France, who matured so slowly; his first volume of verses appeared at twenty-nine and his first novel at thirty-five. He was fortunate to have a mother who if tyrannical did believe in his vocation and his ultimate success; he was fortunate to have a father who let him protract indefinitely his "long and easy childhood."

He began to earn a living at thirty-two, when he was finally appointed to a minor post in the Library of the Senate, at a yearly salary of twenty-two hundred francs (\$440). Though small, this salary meant freedom: he could devote himself entirely to literature. But three decades of parental indulgence had unfitted him to endure the routine and petty tyranny of bureaucracy. Before long, he frankly neglected his duties at the Library: after each summer vacation he would return later to his desk, in spite of all official remonstrances. Ultimately he lost the favor of his immediate superior, Leconte de Lisle, because of a criticism made when his chief was elected to the Academy; and it is quite possible that he was made to feel his inferior position. Nevertheless, the stipend he received was a sheet-anchor in the uncertain life of an author; Anatole France drew his salary from the government for fourteen years; not until 1890 did he finally resign and give up his desk in the old Library.

From the beginning he had used that desk to compose his first works in prose. The modest success of his book on Alfred de Vigny had brought him a number of commissions from Lemerre the publisher, whom he also served as a reader of manuscripts. Lemerre wished him to write biographies to use for prefaces in a series of French classics. In 1874, therefore, France began with a study of Racine, and in the next ten years completed many other similar prefaces, fourteen of which were collected and reprinted, years later, in *Génie latin*.

These juvenilia are not scholarly biographies, although based upon broad reading. But they are real portraits; and when detail is slurred, it is to give greater truth of color and atmosphere. Being an artist rather than a scholar, the author finds the date less important than the adjective; being a man of taste, he recognizes the limits of his canvas. To know the scholar's labors and to know when to forget them is the mark of the true humanist; a little tact is not useless in the critic's task.

Anatole France had all the tact that youth and timidity give. He knew that he was writing for the larger public, for those who usually pass over prefaces, and he hoped that he was writing to be read. He must divine his audience—possible readers of his future novels—he must avoid equally

the steeps of pedantry and the shoals of platitude. He must charm, and he had not yet learned the secret of charming by holding up the mirror to his changing moods. Fifteen years younger than he was when he became the critic of *La Vie littéraire*, he felt that he must take his subject seriously, yet he did find the secret of charming in a sympathetic touch and in lively contrasts of background and pose.

It is sympathy which makes the portrait live. It is sympathy which leads the artist to the heart of his model. So he did best with types like himself. First he studied, in 1874, his favorite Racine, and the portrait is rich in glimpses of the student who penned it. With Racine, Anatole France knew "the charms of a pious education for the ardent young souls that it does not stifle"; he too knew the malady of the cloister, its dangerous gift of intermingling life and dreams to lose oneself therein. But when he adds that religion offers to voluptuous souls "*la volupté de se perdre*," we suddenly realize that this gentle classicist is also an admirer of Baudelaire!

The 'prentice critic finds it hard not to read himself into his model. Be the subject well chosen, his own experience serves as a divining rod. So for Anatole France there is no contradiction in the mocking sallies of *le tendre Racine*: "the same nervous sensibility which excites one to weep at

many things provokes laughter at many others." With Racine, he had thrilled in boyhood to the beauty of the classics; he too had known the visions which float through a poet's soul before he has learned the words required to set them free. And in spite of his self-suppression in most of these studies, he declares that what we love and value in others is "only the points of relationship which bind them to ourselves."

Thus he foreshadows the subjective critic of *La Vie littéraire*—the critic he became in 1887. The later digressions may be lacking, but never a hint, at least, of the irony, the playful grace and wit that mark the personal attitude. He frankly admits that he had not read a serious work of Prévost, *Le Monde moral*; but his portrait of the soldier-abbé and defrocked Bohemian does not suffer by the omission. Naturally the future creator of Jérôme Coignard saw the picturesque in such a man; naturally he delighted in exploring that heart divided between the love of religion and the loves of this world. No one could be more clever than France, even then, in his setting of the background, as when he begins a study of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre by a swift sketch of his native seaport, or relieves a portrait of Chateaubriand against a somber Breton landscape of barren heath and donjon and never-silent sea. No one quicker to remark the universal humanity in his sitters, or to

illustrate a modern text from the pages of the Greeks. And if he cannot resist at times the temptation to display his learning or indulge in an archaism, he knows that to be truly classic one must be simple and natural. "Ce n'est pas en faisant du grec qu'on ressemble le plus aux Grecs." He will be himself, and it is not Molière or Scarron or Le Sage, but the poets Racine and Sainte-Beuve or the prose-poet Chateaubriand whose portraits stir him to freest self-expression.

"The works that are least vain were created by those who best saw the vanity of all things. One must pay for the pride of thinking in sadness and desolation," he asserts in his essay on Racine, written at the age of thirty.

One must pay for the pride of thinking. In the violent revolt which had emancipated him from Catholicism, Anatole France had rushed into the camp of the radicals, the scientific materialists. "In those days," he confessed later, "we were Darwinians, evolutionists; natural selection, systematic selection, the survival of the fittest, seemed to us immutable laws. And we were already working, with all our hearts, to draw from Lamarck's experiments and Darwin's theories a philosophy, a system of ethics, social laws, a political constitution and everything else!"

Anatole France had early become a follower of Taine, whose lectures he attended and whose books

he read. "Taine's teaching inspired in us, about 1870, an ardent enthusiasm, a sort of religion. . . ." Darwin and Taine had been his Messiahs; he had become a fatalist of science; and applying this determinism to the history of his own life, he had written, in 1872, the first draft of *Les Désirs de Jean Servien*. This original version is lost; when he published the novel ten years later he largely rewrote it and greatly softened its acrid tone. Enough bitterness remains to show us that the emancipated young rebel paid for his intellectual freedom.

The reader is already familiar with this novel, with its dreary story of the author's childhood, transposed into low surroundings such as the literary mode then required. Jean Servien is a self-portrait, transmogrified by the dark green glasses of Naturalism; his love for the *tragédienne* Elise Devoyod provided him with the outline and coloring for this tale of disillusion. Anatole France is the lowly-born Jean Servien, cursed by gifts of imagination and feeling, over-educated and weak, and ruined by his love for an actress idealized in a classical rôle. Certainly, the dreams of the poets destroy Jean Servien, as they destroyed Flaubert's Emma Bovary; but the boy is first spoiled by a culture far beyond his condition in life, following the dying wish of a mother convinced that "education alone opens every door."

The Naturalistic formula changes this to tragic irony. "It was the education I gave him which turned him away from practical life," says the uneducated but wise old father. "It was school that made him fall in love with an actress." Such is the moral of the story, delivered after Jean has failed in everything and perished in the Commune. The disillusion of Anatole France in his first dreams of glory is seen in the acridity of the book even after he revised it. He is never tired of contrasting the weak-willed Jean with a father content to remain in his class, or with the skeptical old aunt, a peasant who distrusts all books. At twenty-eight the author felt the dangers of his own character; he was not, as later, blinded by success; and thus he reacted against the idea of a culture that had developed his mind and neglected his will.

*Les Désirs de Jean Servien* lay for a decade in his desk, and was not published until 1882. All through the eighteen-seventies Anatole France dreamed of writing novels; he knew that he could get nowhere with his biographical prefaces, or even with his poetry or drama; for the vision of a success on the stage had evidently tempted him when he wrote *Les Noces corinthiennes*. If he could not write successful drama, he must write stories. So after putting away the bitter first draught of Jean Servien, he completed *Jocaste* and *Le Chat maigre*—two short novels which had to be com-

bined to make a standard volume. In those days his Muse was not gifted with the staying qualities necessary to produce a novel of four hundred pages.

Hence *Jocaste* and *Le Chat maigre*, published in 1879, were his début in Naturalistic fiction. It was the formula of the deterministic novel which created the pretty epileptic heroine of *Jocaste*, who loves a young man and lets herself be married to an old one; and it was the suggestivism of modern medicine that dictated the climax, when the Greek story of Jocasta<sup>1</sup> served to suggest suicide to the girl who, because of guilty love and lack of will, has kept silent while a valet was poisoning her husband. The lover, the ironic young doctor, apparently expresses the author: he too finds in nature "the scene of an everlasting slaughter," and his bleak determinism hints of the author's disillusion.

*Le Chat maigre* is more sympathetic, although even weaker in its construction. It hardly owns a plot, this story of the indolent mulatto who, brought to Paris for an education, drifts through all the gutters of artistic Bohemia. A love story, direct and primitive as the half-savage hero, is added for the sake of a climax, but the book is at

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<sup>1</sup> This heroine was another favorite rôle of Elise Devoyod: the plot of *Jocaste* may well have occurred to Anatole France at a performance of *Œdipe roi*.



best only a gallery of portraits. "Le Chat Maigre," a tavern where the Bohemians meet to dine and discuss art or letters and found literary journals, is clearly a reminiscent caricature of some haunt of the Parnassians and the Naturalists which the author frequented, while the whole novel probably reflects the year of liberty he had enjoyed, when he lived near the Panthéon and explored the cafés and studios of the Latin Quarter at his ease.

Thus the story is a bit more sympathetic than *Jocaste*. In *Jocaste* he had imitated Flaubert; in this story he imitates Daudet and Dickens. In *Le Chat maigre* France found a milieu worthy of Dickens, a background on which the Naturalistic formula might be worked out with figures quaintly ugly and picturesque—figures not wholly unlikable. His own point of view remains aloof, however. He is a spectator of life with aristocratic leanings; he tells us that "democracy can never produce an art"; and carrying his skepticism to the logical end, he makes one speaker assert that every artistic masterpiece is "a dangerous illusion and a culpable fraud."

How clearly this proves that the disillusion of Jean Servien is his own disillusion! Certainly these three stories written between twenty-seven and thirty-five show the price he paid for "the pride of thinking," and perhaps also for the too sheltered life he had so long enjoyed.

But every childhood has to come to an end, and in 1877, two years before this book came out, Anatole France married. Or should we say that his mother found him a wife? For he was ruled by this tender tyrannical mother, who placed in him her hopes for "all that had failed in her own marriage"—wealth, glory and consideration. His mother it was who had hampered his development and helped to make him timid and evasive; mutely she would demand explanations of women's photographs found in his coat pockets, or long hairs upon his coat. We cannot suppose that a mother who would fit together the torn pieces of letters he had thrown away, as he avers she did, would not have her say in the choice of his future wife. Certainly it was she who saw to it that the girl was of a good family, and that her parents had money.

Valérie Guérin came from too good a family; Anatole France, like his hero Professor Bergeret,<sup>1</sup> was later made to suffer from his wife's pride of birth. She was the granddaughter of the painter Guérin, celebrated for his miniatures of Marie Antoinette. Valérie Guérin was a lovely blonde, with very beautiful hands and feet; Anatole France found in her the sculptural beauty he admired. Like so many classic types she soon became "majestic"; but at twenty-two she was "ravishing, and young enough to be his daughter." The young

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<sup>1</sup> In *Le Mannequin d'osier*.

couple soon left the bookseller's villa at Neuilly for the Guérin house in the Rue Chalgrin, a suburb near the Bois de Boulogne, then tranquilly rural as a country village. They occupied rooms in the upper part of the house, which Anatole France made distinctive by some well-chosen bits of old furniture; there was a tiny garden; and in this lodging the future Dean of French letters gathered his friends and talked out his books before he wrote them.

Now that he was married, it was essential to write books as well as talk them. His post at the Library of the Senate yielded so little that he had to depend upon his father-in-law for his lodgings and occasional subventions. So he wrote *La Bûche*, and when his publisher demanded that he extend this ninety-page story to the length of a novel, he added the story of Jeanne Alexandre, thus completing *Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard*, which was published in 1881.

The story is full of memories, and it is no less full of imitations. But imitations are the five-finger exercises of the writer's art, necessary along the toilsome road to music. Scholars have pointed out the sources of this novel, which are evident to every cultivated reader; but their findings are forgotten before the triumphant originality of the result. Good old Bonnard is outwardly a conventional figure. He is the absent-minded professor

of half a dozen novels, but of them all, he is the one we should like to know. His philosophy of life, his humor, his irony, his infinite indulgence and humanity, make him unique; like Goethe in his conversations with Eckermann, he surveys the world from a rampart of Olympian calm. To create such a figure and not to let him fall into platitude, to make him living and lovable, was at least original enough to merit an award from the French Academy.

*Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard* is an immense projection of the artistic imagination. It is a dream of old age dreamed by one still in his thirties, true to atmosphere because it grew out of a wish-fulfillment conditioned by his long childhood. For there is in every life a wish-age to which we aspire; and Anatole France, an only child, early came to envy the "academicians" of the book shop, with all their dignity and consideration. Thus he was glad to reach that moment of languor which, in the sheltered life of a man of books, marks the passing of one's first youth and the acceptance of maturity, with its obligations and its calmer joys. Age had closed certain vistas for Anatole France; marriage had closed still others, in those years when, his first happiness waning, he continued to live as men live when honor or timidity makes them content with marriage.

And Anatole France was for a season content

with wedlock; he could not otherwise have depicted this scholar, this Nestor of letters who has attained through study and reflection the wisdom of the ages. "Time is gentle only to those who take it gently," says his hero—an old scholar who has discovered the secret of tranquillity in the life of books. No dilettante but an ardent mediævalist, he surveys the life of Paris from his casement above the river, "in the most beautiful spot of all the world." Beneath him he sees the streets which he trod as a child, a discoverer no less than Columbus, a discoverer of life; and the Seine, the Sainte-Chapelle, the Louvre and Notre Dame—all that visible beauty of Old Paris with its jewels of carven stone, has become a part of his life, a part of himself, imaged within him in a thousand reflections of thought and feeling. "Without these things I should be nothing," he tells us. "That is why I love Paris with an unbounded love."

With all this, Bonnard has not lost his humanity. In the winter of life he is still tender-hearted enough to sympathize with the poor light-of-love who is forced to bear her child in the cold attic room above his apartment, and the Christmas fire-log he sends her brings him eleven years later a magnificent manuscript, the expression of her gratitude in her prosperity. Such is the first part of the book, *La Bûche*, which builds a story around a reminiscence of his childhood. Then the old

scholar, sent into the country to inventory a library, discovers the daughter<sup>1</sup> of his boyhood sweetheart, and devotes himself to her happiness in tender piety toward an unforgotten past. "Clémentine is dead," he writes in his journal when at last he learns the fate of the girl he loved: "humanity is made up almost entirely of the dead, so few are the living compared to the multitude of those who have lived. Everything passes . . . but life is immortal, and it is life that we must love in its ever-changing forms."

What, then, is the crime imputed to this sage, to this idealized old professor, who sees in the universe only the reflection of his own soul? Merely the abduction of the girl Jeanne, who, thanks to a rascally guardian, is confined in a boarding school where she is constantly ill-treated—the author still remembers his 'teens! As Bonnard is unable to help her, because he refuses to accept the matrimonial advances of the directress of the place, the candid old scholar simply carries her off. But he is saved from the consequences of this rash abduction by the flight of the shifty lawyer and, appointed guardian in his stead, lives to see Jeanne married and to provide her dowry from the sale of a library collected through a lifetime of self-denial and toil.

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<sup>1</sup> In the second version Anatole France, for obvious reasons, makes Jeanne the granddaughter of his old love.

Such is the slender plot of *Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard*. The story is nothing; our interest is in the portrait which it frames. All the romance of the intellectual life is shed upon this figure. One thinks of those early portraits by Manet, set against a background which seems materialized out of the soul of the model, under a light as inevitable as fate. Whether in Paris or in the provinces, not one false note disturbs the harmony of the picture. The peace of life's Indian summer has fallen upon the old scholar; resigned to the approach of winter as Anatole France in his last years never was, he sits cheerful and undisturbed, in a calm filled with memories and thoughts which, birdlike, rise and circle and return with softly flashing wings.

Quotation alone can show this intimate charm in the portrait. Take, for instance, the reverie which follows, consigned to Bonnard's diary after his drive through the moonlight to the neglected château:

"Night reigns in noble languor over men and beasts, freed by her from their daily toil, and I am aware of her benign influence, although now, after sixty years of habit, I feel things only through the signs which represent them. For me the universe has nothing left but words, so long have I studied them! Each of us in his own way dreams his dream of life. Mine I have dreamed in my library, and

when my time comes to quit this world, may God take me on my step-ladder, in front of my book-laden shelves!"

Of course this is the "Nox erat" of Virgil. But Virgil only strikes the opening chord; it is Sylvestre Bonnard who develops the melody. Besides, would such a man as he look at the world through other than classical eyes? Like Anatole France, old Bonnard is a Grecian; despite his mediæval studies the bookshelf next his hand is filled with the poets of antiquity. He understands the classic world, and when Madame Trépof rails at poor barren Sicily, she provokes an outburst which her butterfly soul is hardly fitted to comprehend:

"This land is not frightful, Madame. This land is a land of glory. Beauty is a thing so great and so august, that centuries of barbarism can not so blot it out as not to leave something to adore. The majesty of Demeter of old still hovers over these arid hills, and the Greek muse, which sent its notes divine echoing over the Arethusa and the Menalus, still sings to my ear on the denuded mountain or in the dried-up spring. Yes, Madame, in earth's last days when, lifeless as the moon to-day, our globe shall roll through space its pallid corpse, the soil which bears the ruins of Selinonte will keep through the death of all things the traces



of its beauty. And then there will be no frivolous lips to blaspheme its solitary grandeur.' ”

Ernest Renan, whose lectures Anatole France attended, and whose intellect he “loved to the point of idolatry,” could not have spoken more mellifluously of the classical lands he loved. Indeed, Sylvestre Bonnard is so like Renan that his portrait could only be the work of a disciple. This Bonnard is a scholar; after exhausting the thirteenth century he turns in his old age to botany as a recreation—but he is a scholar who knows the vanity of documents proving the sale of a rabbit hutch six hundred years ago. He is a philosopher too, for his fruitless trip to Naples in quest of a manuscript ends with the admission: “We are everlastingly children and we never cease to run after new toys.” A lover of books and a book hunter, he accepts philosophically Madame Trépof’s passion for collecting match boxes: “After all, they were making a collection, and could I laugh at them without laughing at myself?”

In fine, he is a disillusioned scholar, saddened by the thought that his effort to preserve a dead world was both laborious and vain. “All that has lived is the destined nutriment of new lives,” and so his selling of his library in order to provide Jeanne’s dowry is as significant as his turning away from philology in his old age.

Yet, though the philologist turns botanist, we must not conclude that Anatole France finds science any less vain than the study of dead words. When he wrote *Sylvestre Bonnard* in 1881, Anatole France had ceased to believe in science; in his old age he warned a later generation against youth's habit of hasty generalization. In 1885 he again derided science and her claims in the final chapters of *Le Livre de mon ami*:

"Phenomena! Whom do they not attract? Does Science herself, whose claims are being constantly dinned into our ears, go beyond mere seeming? What, pray, does Professor Robin find at the bottom of his microscope? Appearances, and nothing but appearances. As Euripides has said, we are vainly driven about by dreams."

To the generation of Anatole France, as to Renan, it had seemed that Science was to solve the riddle of the universe and the riddle of life. He, too, had embarked with her on her quest of finality, only to find that the goal of the expedition was to store the shelves of a museum. Led into erudition by its romance, as an alchemist is lured on by the dream of the philosopher's stone, Sylvestre Bonnard realizes at last that "those who were worth more than he, the masters, the great, have died at their task without discovering that something which, having no body, has no name, yet

without which, no intellectual labor would be undertaken on this earth."

But for the creator of Sylvestre Bonnard there were consolations for his disillusion. Anatole France was now the father of a little daughter, Suzanne. His novel had received the prize of the French Academy, and was rapidly becoming a "best seller"; the family was able to take a trip to Alsace in the summer vacation of 1882; two letters written this year and one during the following summer depict the novelist keenly interested in the doings of his baby daughter, who arranged old shoes on her father's writing-table and collected flowers and frogs in the woods. Admittedly, the disillusioned skeptic was happy in his first years of married life; the fact is plain in the book that he published in 1885.

For *Le Livre de mon ami* is the romance of a young father. Having reached the great milestone of forty—*nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita*—he turns his gaze backward upon his own childhood, before relating the childhood of his daughter Suzanne. For "it is sweet to remember; the silence of the night invites one to do so. . . . The curtains of the windows are drawn, the portières hang in heavy folds upon the carpet. Only one door is open halfway, there, in the direction toward which

my eyes instinctively turn. From it comes an opalescent light; from it comes the sound of soft and even breathing, in which I cannot myself distinguish the mother's from those of the children.

"Sleep, cherished ones, sleep on!"

Anatole France had but one child; he adds another in his picture, as in his book he added memories of another child to the story of Suzanne's infancy. That other child is himself. Again he looks back, but through rosy glasses, at his boyhood, the boyhood which before he went to school he must have found so idyllically happy, since he returned to it in no less than four volumes.<sup>1</sup>

And nothing could be more delightful than *Le Livre de mon ami*—the book so largely drawn upon for the first chapter of our study. This volume of memories has pages which surpass even the finest of the Tales, for no sophisticated art can give the delicacy of an artist's feeling for stories that he has lived. It is as if he had recovered something of the untarnished sensitiveness of a child's vision. "There are times when everything surprises me, times when the simplest things give me a mysterious thrill." Endowed with this sympathy, he senses the perpetual miracle of a baby's life, full

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<sup>1</sup> As he himself said of Racine, if "he had been brought up without affection, he would not have been able to spend in his life that charming soul made for passion and for love." Marcel Le Goff, *Anatole France à la Béchellerie*, p. 67.

of poetry because enwrapped in illusion, because each step forward is led by the mirage of the unknown:

Tout dans l'immuable nature  
Est miracle aux petits enfants;  
Ils naissent, et leur âme obscure  
Eclôt dans des enchantements. . . .

L'inconnu, l'inconnu divin  
Les baigne comme une eau profonde,  
On les presse, on leur parle en vain,  
Ils habitent un autre monde. . . .

Leur tête légère et ravie  
Songe tandis que nous pensons:  
Ils font de frissons en frissons  
La découverte de la vie.<sup>1</sup>

This is the spirit of the second part of the book, the story of Suzanne. But despite his joy in his paternity, Anatole France was unable to round out

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<sup>1</sup> Though the world unchanging rolls,  
All is miracle to the child;  
Life, to little darkling souls,  
Dawns, with magic all beguiled. . . .

'Tis a realm inscrutable  
Holds them 'neath its heavenly surge;  
Vain to question them, or urge,  
In a lovelier world they dwell.

Little heads a-dreaming still,  
Not for them reflection grey;  
Life's discoverers are they,  
Each to everything athrill.

a volume with anecdotes of his daughter; his inspiration flagged; he had to ransack his portfolios and use certain essays and dialogues which he had written in the manner of Renan.<sup>1</sup> In these final pages he emphasizes the folly of children's books, books written for children alone. He would make children read the *Odyssey* in translation, or *Robinson Crusoe*; he would never give books of popular science to the young, nor "tell children about guano instead of fairies."

And so *Le Livre de mon ami* marks still more clearly his revolt against science. "Our world is full of pharmacists who fear the imagination," he cries, "and very wrong they are. With all its falsehoods, it is imagination which sows all beauty, all virtue in the world. Only through it are we great. O mothers! have no fear that it will destroy your children! On the contrary it will keep them from vulgar faults and facile mistakes."

Imagination is everything. "Not by the faculty of laughter does man rise above the animals, but by the gift of dreaming. The story-teller remakes the world after his own fashion, and gives to lesser men, to the simple, to children, a chance to make it over in theirs."

"To know is nothing, to imagine is everything," said the fairy of his dream to Sylvestre Bonnard.

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<sup>1</sup> Renan's just published *Souvenirs d'enfance et de jeunesse* probably inspired *Le Livre de mon ami*.

Now Anatole France declares that "fairies exist precisely because they are imaginary." And he shows how the first myths, forgotten by men, survived on the lips of the grandmother spinning by her fireside, an eternal delight to the children of her child. So grand'mère herself became a myth, "la Mère l'Oie." And "La Reine Pédauque," represented on the portals of so many French churches, is Mother Goose herself.

The poet in Anatole France has silenced for a season the disciple of Taine. Just completed, his first fairy tale, *Abeille*, indicates the part he has chosen. "For myself," he asserts in the last pages of *Le Livre de mon ami*, "I would gladly give a whole library of the philosophers rather than lose the fairy-tale *Peau d'âne*."

Thus, at forty, Anatole France could still escape from life in the dreams of infancy.



## 4

THE dreams of infancy which find voice in the fairy tale *Abeille* (1883) and in *Nos Enfants*, the baby-stories written with his daughter in mind, soon became dreams of Edens less idyllic, filled with a curiosity of the senses. They show that the library of Anatole France was being invaded by new and troubling visions. Obsessed, after the success of *Sylvestre Bonnard*, by admirers who did their best to spoil him, he was already filled with the thirst for experience which he gave to the heroine of *Balthasar*.

Balthasar is the pagan king of Ethiopia. He loves the queen of Sheba, that mysterious Balkis who, for us, lives on in the tales of Nodier and Gérard de Nerval, and in *La Tentation de Saint-Antoine*. He woos this languid beauty, protests his desire to serve her, until she admits her one unsatisfied craving: "I should like to be afraid." Curious as the Roman ladies of the Decadence, she longs to meet danger, to face the unknown, the terrors of the night and its perilous qualms. So they seek adventure in the queen's capital, their golden raiment doffed for beggars' garb.



"The night was black. Balkis was very tiny in the night." But the love of danger makes her brave, and she leads her lover to a pothouse of the slums. Here, in the company of porters and prostitutes, Balkis tastes the unknown savor of salt fish and onions. But having forgotten to bring money, they are set upon with threats and blows, and the king only wins their freedom by main force. Not till then does Balkis tell her burly champion that she loves him.

Balthasar has shed his blood for her. And he sheds it again before the adventure ends, with their rescue from the brigands who find them sleeping in the hills. Struck down then in her defense, unconscious through days and nights of raving, he rises from his bed to find her closeted with a new lover, and to his mage he complains of the evils of this world. "Wisdom makes one happy," replies the astrologer, so the king sets out in search of wisdom.

He builds a tower to observe the stars, and then he knows the blessings of the sage. "While I am studying astronomy, I do not think of Balkis, nor of anything whatsoever. The sciences are useful; they keep men from thinking. Sembobitis, teach me the knowledge that destroys feeling in man, and I shall raise you in honors among my people." So his mage instructs him in the secrets of the sky.

He learns how to draw horoscopes. At last he

can draw them as well as Sembobitis himself. Has he discovered the way of truth, and learned how to make accurate predictions? "Science is infallible," replies his teacher, "but scholars are constantly making mistakes." And Sembobitis denies the king's discovery, a new star, a wonderful new star which promises well for some unknown nativity.

Meanwhile Balkis learns that the king has forgotten her, and straightway she knows that she loves him only. Dismissing her new lover, she sets out to find the old, and her camel-train winds its way across the desert sands toward the astronomer-king. From his tower he descries her in all her beauty, but despite the terrible force drawing him earthward, he lifts his eyes again to the wonderful star, and it bids him follow its light to One who, in reward for his seeking, promises true riches and joy and love. So he sets out to meet Gaspard and Melchoir already on the way. Many days the Three Kings follow the star, until it rests over the manger in Bethlehem. "And entering the dwelling, they found the Child with Mary His mother, and they bowed down and worshipped Him; and offered Him gold and incense and myrrh, as it is related in the Gospel."

*Balthasar* is worth consideration, despite the slightness of the story, because it is the author's first historical tale, and it shows him groping to

find his method. He takes a Biblical story, and he relates it with all the simplicity and the unction of the Scriptural narrative. But he complicates his personages by lending them his own emotions. His is the thirst for experience which he ascribes to Balkis—a thirst unsatisfied by a marriage arranged for him, and which no interval of freedom preceded. His perhaps is the disillusionment in love and woman felt by the king; his is the desire to lose himself and his suffering in science, and the king's disappointment in his hope. And his, too, is the wish implied in the ending, the regret for a lost faith, the sweetness of which comes back to him as he remembers how his mother first told him this story without the embellishments he was adding.

Certainly the claims of science are not taken very seriously in *Balthazar*. But the baldest parody of scholarship is reached in the next story of that volume of tales, *Monsieur Pigeonneau*, an archæological fantasy such as Théophile Gautier loved. Monsieur Pigeonneau is a caricature of Sylvestre Bonnard, a savant who hates imagination as "the cruelest enemy of science." To this fatuous Dr. Dryasdust comes a charming American girl, seeking advice on the details of an Egyptian costume to wear at a ball. Then she asks him for a fairy tale, adding, "What would be the use of science, if it

did not help you to write tales?" And the academician is forced to write it for her, hypnotized by the eyes of the Egyptian cat she has given him.

*Monsieur Pigeonneau* is more than a parody—it is evidently an actual personal experience. Anatole France now had many fair admirers in Parisian society, and among them he found a different attitude toward scholars than the one he had presented in *Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard*, that portrait of his first ideal, the ideal of his cloistered immaturity. In *Monsieur Pigeonneau*, whose very name is ironic, Anatole France gives us a foretaste of his sophistication in later years, when he ridiculed his hero, Professor Bergeret, and became frankly contemptuous of the story of good Bonnard, the novel that gave him his first fame in America.

The rest of the collection of tales called *Balthazar* is negligible except *La fille de Lilith*, which is also biographically significant. Theology, occultism and voluptuousness are blended in this story of a pre-Adamite maiden, whose prayer, "Promise me death that I may enjoy life, give me remorse so that I may find pleasure," reveals a Baudelairean obsession with sin hardly less personal than the aspiration toward an exotic love, a love far removed from reality, in the tale *Læta Acilia*. Into this story he brings the figure of Mary Magdalene,

a sinner-saint like Thaïs, whose story he was even then composing.

From now on there was no austerity in Anatole France's choice of heroines; the creator of *Sylvestre Bonnard* and *Le Livre de mon ami* underwent in his forties a great transformation. Writing to a friend in 1883, Madame France remarked upon the Russian and Swiss admirers who, during their holidays in Alsace, were "spoiling" her husband by flatteries of his talent. And she undoubtedly taxed him with listening too long to the more attractive of these new friends, since we are told by a credible witness that he was "always trembling and stammering before his imperious spouse." He wanted to enjoy the adulation his books were bringing—to enter the world of society from which his birth and fortune had so long debarred him. He was then, "after twenty consecutive years in a library, a man who had suddenly turned back again to living and who asked for nothing more than to give himself to life." At Paris, he had been taken up by Madame Aubernon, who wished to secure him for her salon, the most famous of the capital; but to her he had preferred Madame Arman de Caillavet, a rich Jewess of great intelligence and mordant wit, who was finally to become his friend and Egeria. Naturally Madame France was jealous of the illustrious husband who neglected her. Their relations were

stormy and their commerce strained, until the marriage ended in divorce.<sup>1</sup>

Madame de Caillavet first met France in 1883. "I like his style and his mind," she wrote to a friend, "but I do not like either his character or his manners." And the reason is evident. An eyewitness describes him the day of his first appearance at her dinner table, with his "long and heavy horse-like head twisted by a slight torticollis, his jaw, one-sided under his thick beard, his stiff hair brushed back, his great nose and rough grey skin." His face was "only lighted up by his very brilliant black eyes, magnificent in vitality and intelligence." What could she find in this "somewhat disturbing physiognomy, in which there was something of the seminarist, something of the Bonapartist and something of the faun"? When he spoke, he spoke badly; he stammered, his grave and unctuous voice was at times nasal. She mistrusted his character; it took time for his intelligence to overcome the unfortunate impression made by his awkwardness and timidity. But when she realized that he was a genius, when she saw what she could do to cure his indolence and govern his manners, their friendship began; by 1887 she had become his Egeria, and during the summer of that year he was in-

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<sup>1</sup> France broke with his wife in June, 1892, and was divorced fourteen months later.

vited, together with his wife and his daughter, to her country house at Capian, near Bordeaux.

So it was to her that he related in the course of the next year the various stages in the composition of *Thaïs*. A pagan with the Catholic imagination of his early training, Anatole France now turned back to the lives of those Christian anchorites which had so fascinated him since his mother first read to him the *Lives of the Saints*, and setting one of these figures against the luxury of Alexandria, he limned a fresco full of contrasted and exotic color.

Everyone knows the story of *Thaïs*, which Massenet has made into an opera. But the original version of the theme is a naïve Latin drama, written in the days of the Emperor Otto by a Saxon nun, Hroswitha. In this primitive miracle-play *Thaïs* is a courtesan redeemed by a monk, Paphnutius, who gains admittance to her in the guise of a lover. In the version of Anatole France, the anchorite pays the price of his conceit by yielding at last to a desperate passion for his lovely convert. The despiser of the flesh is conquered by the flesh: no penance and no discipline avail. Sinner is changed to saint and saint to sinner; Aphrodite is avenged, and the amiable skeptic of the story, Nicias the Cyrenaic, is seen to be the ideal of the author, an intellectual hedonist, an ironical dilet-

tante of the senses and the arts. It is thus that Anatole France felt on emerging from his library.

Such was the simple fabric that was embroidered into *Thaïs*. The embellished tale is not without hesitations and *longueurs*; its beauty lies in its color. Only an artist, with an artist's imagination and a painter's touch, could have clothed the dry skeleton of the legend with this living palpitating flesh. Only one who still idealized the senses could have breathed into his Galatea the mingled fire and languor of this cultured, corrupted age, posed her against so rich a background—Alexandria with its shining roofs under a hot blue tropical sky, the yellow Nile and the Pyramids, and the desert dreaming its infinite dream before an unseeing Sphinx. Rich as Titian's or Tintoretto's pictures and no less indifferent to Puritanism, *Thaïs* stands out like an oil painting against the pure soft water colors of *Les Noces corinthiennes*—similar in the hatred of religion which is its motif, but much more sensual in texture and impasto. Yet even dialogue does not save its discussions from being tiresome.

For the story has too many pages of this sort. *Thaïs* is, in fact, a pageant of metaphysics, a procession of the philosophical systems. Not one but has its advocate at the symposium in the second chapter. And the symposium drags out until the Stoic, full of years and wisdom, ends a conversation



with his friends by killing himself—a voluntary Socrates who might well be suspected of having read Marcus Aurelius. Yet, if various attitudes are presented in the story, the skeptic Nicias, who expresses Anatole France, has the best of the argument. A disciple of Pyrrho alone may accept equally all the philosophies, accept as poetry these “sick men’s dreams.” And the author palpably enjoys his own superiority to all philosophic dreamers. “For the systems constructed by the sages are only tales invented to amuse the eternal childhood of man.” They too are part of the everlasting flux, seen differently by all the children of men. “The pyramids of Memphis seem, at daybreak, like cones of rosy light. At sunset they appear like black triangles against the flaming sky. But who shall penetrate their substance?”

Never perhaps was philosophic nihilism so alluringly arrayed. But poetry and philosophy are not so far apart in the mind of Anatole France. The philosophy may be taken from a work on the Greek skeptics, but the touch of the artist and poet has transformed it, as Flaubert before him and to greater effect changed erudition to art in *La Tentation de Saint-Antoine*.

The reader will recall that *La Tentation de Saint-Antoine* is a metaphysical and mystic orgy, a Saturnalian revel of philosophies. In Flaubert, too, we find the Gymnosophist used in *Thaïs*, the com-

parison between Buddhism and Christianity, the opposition of the spirit and the flesh—that rather significantly vivid struggle which completes a fresco vainly striving to be objective. The setting of the final chapter, where the too heroic monk goes back to his desert and his new temptations, the Egyptian tomb with its wall-paintings, the monsters, the pack of jackals, are all reminiscent of Flaubert; in *Thaïs*, as in the *Tentation*, we have the idealization of the sensual note which marks the author's comparative inexperience in the life of the senses. The agonies of Saint Anthony fall also upon the anchorite of *Thaïs*, but in this work the cross does not conquer at the end. Too blind to perceive and seize the salvation offered to his soul in useful labor, the monk Paphnutius vainly carries his temptations to a pillar and thence to a desert tomb; now he cannot distinguish the voice of the Devil from the voice of God. Vain too is his final yielding to the hopes of life and love so long despised, since he reaches his convert only to see her die, a saint, while her sisters in piety drive him away from the body as if he were a vampire.

Christianity had triumphed over paganism in *Les Noces corinthiennes*. In *Thaïs* the pagan spirit is victorious, in its turn, as it is now triumphant in the author. One other standpoint remained, to show the new faith, in its humble beginnings, ignored by the old, and to deny the existence of

its Founder. Even then, Anatole France held this point of view, and he dramatized it vividly in *Le Procureur de Judée*.

The story is found in *L'Etui de nacre*, published two years later (1892). None of the tales is so faultless in technique, none so characteristic of Anatole France in its psychologic insight and atmosphere. A touch of his wand and we see Baïæ of old—a marble city bathed by a sapphire sea. We walk the vine-clad hills above the town, watch the meeting of Lælius Lamia and his old friend Pontius Pilatus, hear their reminiscences at the dinner in the villa, sympathize with the former procurator, now deprived of his province, in the unmerited disgrace which has fallen upon him after a lifetime devoted to the Empire. More than this, we share his resentment at the cause of his ruin, the fanatic race which had refused his aqueducts and opposed his justice and zeal in their behalf.

Then the two friends speak of the religion of the Jews. Half mockingly, Lamia remarks that some day the Jewish Jupiter may find a place in the Pantheon of Rome. Pilate smiles, convinced that a people still quarreling over its dogmas cannot impose them upon the outside world. He recalls to Lamia the mad intolerance of the Jews, their zeal in persecuting heretics and their appeals to him for the death of the unorthodox. Forced as a Roman executive to sanction their decrees, unable to make

them tolerant in matters of religion, he has had his very justice made the basis of complaints to the proconsul, so that he finally lost his province thereby. And he concludes that because of their unreason the Jews must be destroyed.

Lamia tries to calm his virtuous wrath. He speaks of the simple hearts he has found among this people, of the heroic heretics he has seen die for a cause. For he too has lived in Judæa as Pilate's guest for many years, after his own indiscretions had banished him from Rome. Then he praises the beauty of the Jewish women, while Pontius blames him for a celibacy which has given no children to the state. Yet Lamia continues, vaunting the grace of the Syrian dancers, like the voluptuary that he is, until he comes to mention an old love—a girl who had left him to join the band of a young Galilean wonder-worker, Jesus of Nazareth. And he asks Pilate if he remembers this man, put to death for some forgotten cause.

Pilate knits his brows. Then, after some moments of silence he replies: "Jesus? Jesus of Nazareth? I do not recollect him."

And so the story leaves you, with a perfect climax, disconcerting but inevitable. That speech concentrates in a single phrase the humble and obscure beginnings of Christianity. But we must add that Anatole France meant far more than this when he wrote it. He wished to show that Christ

never existed. Page after page of his friends' reminiscences show his zeal, which in his old age became almost fanatic, to disprove the historicity of Christ.

The portrait of Pilate, who has seen too many founders of religions to be specially impressed by any, is not easily forgotten. In this portrait we find a proof of the insight given to Anatole France, and his power to formulate the psychology of the past. He reads the Roman mind; he reads too the souls in which the seeds of Christianity were first sown. After Pontius Pilate, a splendid foil to the rest of the volume, *L'Etui de nacre* gives us the stories *Amycus et Celestin*, *Sainte Oliverie et Sainte Liberette*, *Sainte Euphrosine*, *Scolastica* and *Le Jongleur de Notre-Dame*. What a vision of the early Christians and the Middle Ages in the candor of these legends retold! Free from irony or philosophic intention, such richly illuminated pages defy analysis. One must read them in order to feel their qualities, delicate as the work of a Fra Angelico in prose.

Nor is there need to relate the anecdotes of the French Revolution which he used to complete the volume, making it a promise of *Les Dieux ont soif*. *Mémoires d'un volontaire* is a literary mosaic, the author tells us, of real happenings in the eighteenth century, while some of the other tales are borrowed from anecdotes first related in *Le Livre de mon ami*. As we have seen before, Anatole France is

fond of quoting without quotation marks, and he is equally fond of quoting himself. Criticism is disarmed when at the end of the last episode the author states his belief "that he has already heard that story somewhere." Were these tales first told him by his old grandmother?

However that may be, the stories bear the stamp of truth and actuality. The imagination of Anatole France was quick to catch the generous ardor behind the first Revolutionary dream of equality, and to see the irony of its failure. The hopes of 1789—with the Bastille destroyed and the Golden Age brought back to earth—that vision of fraternity which only too soon degenerated into suspicion and denunciation—how all this age of idealism lives again for us, relieved against the prison and the awful shadow of the guillotine! But he loves even more the Ancien Régime, with its epicurean poise, its irony and its quiet heroism; and when he depicts a *grande dame* renouncing her hope of love and freedom to save a turnkey's daughter (*La Victime volontaire*), one can see his native sympathy for the culture of the eighteenth century, that last flower of a forgotten chivalry and an outworn Renaissance.

"I love the things of days gone by and I like to live in the company of the dead," Anatole France avers in his middle forties, proving that he is still, despite all his later attempts to disprove it, a

dreamer in a library, albeit a dreamer whom success and adulation were slowly transforming into a sophisticated Epicurean, like his hero, Nicias. And we may add with him, "Who of us does not like to live in the past? Who of us does not sometimes feel the need of it? It would be too little to live in the present, for the present is but a point that flees incessantly." So he had written his tales of other times, finding in them not merely the joys of an antiquarian, but a door which offered, like his new love, an escape from life's reality. It is a dream country to which he carries us in these vivid fables, a strand far from the dusty streets of Paris. But by its definition the tale must transport the reader to the land of dreams.

He takes us there in a magic boat. All readers may embark with him for the seas of enchantment. None will fail to see how a real vision inspired these voyages, but only the scholar conscious of all his sources will know from how many pieces the dream ship was constructed. For the author himself is speaking in the confession of Jacques Tournebroche: "Like Aulus Gellius, who brought together the finest pages of the philosophers in his *Attic Nights*, like Apuleius who put into his *Metamorphoses* the best of the fables of the Greeks, I give myself the labors of the honey-bee in order to distil a nectar divine."



## 5

THOUGH still a dreamer of the past, the Anatole France of *Thaïs* is clearly far more sophisticated, far more worldly than the Anatole France of *Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard*. And this sophistication appears in the critical articles which he was writing at the same time.

In 1887 he was asked to replace Jules Claretie as the literary critic of *Le Temps*. He had hesitated to accept the position; regular work he always detested, but Madame de Caillavet insisted. Now, an article a week made a volume a year. So for this victory over his natural indolence he thanks the editor of *Le Temps*, in the preface to the first volume of these collected articles: "You have made me a periodical and regular writer; you have triumphed over my indolence." But these thanks are really addressed to Madame de Caillavet; it was due to her stimulus that the dreamer who had taken four or five years to complete a book became an active writer. In the ten years which followed the beginning of their intimacy, in 1887, Anatole France completed and published fifteen volumes.



His gift for criticism was but the other side of his nature, divided between imagination and analysis.

His tales were the tales of a poet, disgusted by the present. None but a poet could have lived in sympathy the lives of the saints, thrilled to the mingled horror and heroism of the French Revolution, seen in Pontius Pilate the spirit of a world-empire. But to realize these dreams of a dead past, to make them clear and convincing as a modern novel, took more than mere imagination. Call it clairvoyance if you will—clairvoyance of this sort is really historical insight based upon antiquarian scholarship. The story-teller is a dreamer, yet he is also a very subtle critic.

Spiritual isolation and timidity had made him a dreamer. But he was born a critic; if *Le Livre de mon ami* is a confession, he needed no priestly training to teach him how to apply dialectic to experience. His *Alfred de Vigny* proves that at twenty-four he had a critical insight limited only by his lack of knowledge concerning life. Behind his portrait of Racine we see our critic at thirty, judging his youth's attempt to solve the riddle of the universe by nineteenth-century science and eighteenth-century philosophy. We see him as a disillusioned skeptic, before he had taken disillusion for a mask. When, thirteen years later, he began his regular column for *Le Temps*, Anatole France

had read enough of Montaigne to see how easy it was to sleep upon the pillow of doubt, and even to dream thereon. Gradually the indulgent skeptic had become the "mocking Benedictine monk" of his editor's fancy.

"Every age is commonplace to those who live in it." This explains his preoccupation with the past in the four volumes of *La Vie littéraire*, made up of weekly chats on books, men and events, and published between 1887 and 1892. No dry reviewing this, but scholarship on a holiday, familiar and genial, yet rich in many a philosophic vista. Like the Lady of Shalott, he views in literature the reflected life of the past and of his own day, and this partial approach to reality seems only to confirm him in his skepticism. Half a dozen years older, he is no longer the optimist Sylvestre Bonnard; he is Renan in his last stage, tired of serious scholarship and amusing himself with ideas. Ernest Renan, "le plus sage des hommes," is become his master, and if we turn back three years to *Le Livre de mon ami*, we shall find, in a dialogue directly imitated from *Dialogues philosophiques*, the very spirit of Renan's final dilettantism: "I shall mingle in one love the two children of my thought, so as not to do injury to my real son." If we add to Renan the great modern relativist Montaigne, we shall have his exemplars during the years of reading which prepared him for *La Vie littéraire*.

What is dilettantism? For Anatole France it is "le don de s'amuser de soi-même." It is intellectual epicureanism; "one wearies of everything except the joys of comprehending." It is a religion of universal curiosity spiced by erudition and guided by taste. Skeptical of absolute values, it accepts the game of thought for the game's sake, and it builds no philosophical system. Hence its inconsistencies, its contradictions, since those who follow the great god Mood must, like Montaigne, possess two or three philosophies. "Woe unto him who does not contradict himself at least once a day," had said Renan. Anatole France wrote in the Preface to his second volume, "I am afraid of absolutely logical souls."

Breadth extended even to inconsistency will hardly be dogmatic, hence he builds up no theory of æsthetics. Artist that he is, compelled to choose because all art is selective, he does not exalt his personal preferences into a theory. Others may call such conduct timid, but he can justify himself. "I believe that we shall never know," he writes in a preface, "exactly why a thing is beautiful." To him "beauty is a part of the universal illusion. It is the eye of man which creates the beauty of the heavens and the earth. We confer beauty upon things by loving them; love contains all the mystery of the ideal. But, idealists or realists, we are all

alike the playthings of appearances. . . . Beauty is the only reality we are permitted to seize."

We think at once of Plato's *Protagoras*. But this destroyer of philosophy knows the Greek philosophers, and the procession of the systems has helped to make him more skeptical. In philosophy, as in the world about him, he sees only relativity and change. Yet he loves philosophy as the history of man's thought, loves it as a scholar and a humanist. For him as for Pascal, "thought is man in his entirety," the source of his dignity and the secret of his despair. He loves it also as a master of dialectics and as a sophist, as we may see in his essay on Jules Lemaître, and for Anatole France thought is philosophic doubt.

Let us see what he has to say of his fellow-Renanist, Lemaître—and incidentally of himself. "His fortunate perversity," reads the essay, "consists in doubting incessantly. That is the condition to which reflection has reduced him. Thought is a frightful thing. It is the acid that dissolves the universe; if all men were to set to thinking at once, the world would immediately cease to exist. But this misfortune is not to be feared. Thought is the worst of things. It is also the best, for if it is true to say that it destroys everything, one can also say that it has created all things. Only through it do we conceive the universe, and when it demon-

strates to us that the universe is inconceivable, it does but shatter the bubble it has blown."

How all this recalls the *Dialogues philosophiques*! Only Renan, surely, could keep his paradoxes dancing so skillfully upon thin air. Only Renan, before him, could blow them so rich in color and beauty, yet light as thistledown. To juggle with ultimate things as if they were silver balls—Renan alone had done that: Anatole France as critic adopts the rôle he had given to the mocking Cyrenaïc Nicias, in his story *Thaïs*.

So from Nicias' creator we can expect nothing but subjective criticism. "As I understand it," he says in his first Preface, "criticism, like philosophy or history, is a kind of novel for the use of curious or discreet minds, and every novel, correctly speaking, is an autobiography. The good critic is the one who relates the adventures of his soul in the midst of masterpieces." For Anatole France objective criticism is as impossible as objective art, since we are all of us prisoned in self, unable to escape from our personalities. Better admit the fact, then, if we speak at all; to be perfectly frank, the critic should say: "Gentlemen, I am going to speak of myself in connection with Shakespeare, Racine or Goethe. It is a rather fine opportunity."

Was this denial of objective truth meant for a challenge? At any rate it had the effect of one, and the glove cast down by Renan's brilliant dis-

ciple was picked up by the sturdiest intellectual son of Taine. To name Brunetière is to describe his tart rejoinder, delivered in the classic pages of *La Revue des Deux-Mondes*, January 1st, 1891. After his long labors in critical scholarship, Brunetière had become the editor of that bulwark of literary conservatism, and now, a humanist armed with all the sledges of dialectics, he did his best to crush the new critic, the dangerous butterfly of erudition, the dilettante whose sophistries were apparently aimed at scholarship itself. But his attempt to refute France and his doctrine of the subjectivity of knowledge was hardly more successful than those of the philosophers who had declaimed against that doctrine, and over the noise of Brunetière's logic the butterfly hovered still.

Our concern, moreover, is with the butterfly. Let us keep the image, for it alone translates the volatile grace and lightness of those literary chats. Such might be the essays of Montaigne reincarnate, a Montaigne turned antiquary and *chroniqueur parisien*. Like the Lord of Eyquem, like Elia too, Anatole France follows his fancy where it listeth: "Je cause, et la causerie a ses hasards." So perfectly natural does it seem at times that one is more than half deceived. None the less, chance is not master here. Well does this critic know what he would say—or leave unsaid! He may say it naïvely, but *ars est celare artem*. He always says it simply,

though with a somewhat affected simplicity. When one of his friends remarked this affectation he replied that people would soon get used to it. And so easy was it to get used to simplicity that Anatole France soon had his imitators, while in his work the tone which had first seemed artificial soon gained a roundness that gave it authority. In these years of writing for the general public he mastered the graces of language, as in the salon of Madame de Caillavet he grew under her constant tutelage into the sophisticated and well-tailored boulevardier which he became, as we may see by the portraits of his fat and sleek middle years.

His method, with all its simplicity and its somewhat mannered graces, may best be illustrated in his own words. Ernest Renan had just published a volume of his great history, the task of a lifetime. Remember that Anatole France was speaking of the work of a master—and of his own master. Here is his introduction:

“Must I essay to describe for you the impression I felt in reading this second volume of *The History of Israel*? Must I display to you my mood (*l'état de mon âme*) while I was dreaming from page to page? 'Tis a sort of criticism for which I have only too much inclination, as you know. When I have told what I have felt, I can hardly ever say more, and all my art is scribbling on the margins of books. A leaf turned over is like a torch

put into my hand; it sets to dancing twenty butterflies which spring from my brain. . . . If I drive them away, others come, and they seem to murmur with their beating wings: 'We are little Psyches; friend, do not drive us away. . . . An immortal spirit fills with life our ephemeral forms. Look: we are seeking Eros, Eros never to be found, Eros the great secret of life and death.' And really it is always one of these little Psyches who writes my article for me! How she manages, Heaven knows, but without her I should do far worse."

Thus he attained in Parisian society not merely sophistication, but even its characteristic inconsequence. What the little Psyches in his brain, ever pursuing Desire, bring him now is the memory of his mother's Bible, with its seventeenth-century woodcuts, and these pictures occupy him almost to the exclusion of the book he is set to review.

So for Anatole France criticism becomes a marginal note inspired by his mood. It becomes a gloss, a gloss creative as the text it adorns. *La Vie littéraire* is a *journal intime* of literary impressions, of general ideas—"it is so delightful to philosophize." It is a portrait of the artist; and if he reveals no systematic tendency, tendencies he certainly does display. In the first place, breadth; for "one has less chance of being absolutely mistaken when one admires things which are very diverse." Yet he insists upon style, the simple style of the



Greeks, and he hates neologism and the straining for effect of the Goncourt clan as he hates the platitudes of Georges Ohnet or the monstrous rhetoric of Victor Hugo. For Anatole France, as for the eighteenth century he cherishes, taste is the first canon of literature: "Without taste, one shocks even those who have none." So he likes the tale better than the novel, and he admits "a secret preference for little masterpieces." Taste means restraint: "To tell everything is to tell nothing." Taste means beauty, and "in art everything which is not beautiful is false." Hence his chief abomination, now that he has recovered from its blight, is Naturalism, and nothing could be finer than the page which concludes his study of Zola, which shows us that even a skeptic may have ideals:

"There is in all of us . . . an instinct for beauty, a desire for all that adorns and beautifies, which, diffused throughout the world, makes the charm of life. Monsieur Zola does not know it. In some hearts desire and modesty are mingled in charming nuances. Monsieur Zola does not know it. Many a weakness even, many an error and fault has its touching beauty. Grief is sacred: the holiness of tears lies at the bottom of all religions. Unhappiness alone would be enough to make man august to man. Monsieur Zola does not know it. He does not know that the Graces are modest, that philosophic irony is indulgent and mild; and that hu-

man affairs inspire in noble hearts only two feelings, admiration or pity. Monsieur Zola is worthy of profound pity."

Thus ended a review of *La Terre*; there was not one digression in this richly deserved rebuke, and even an etymologist could call it a criticism! But only two years later, when the bankruptcy of Naturalism was assured, we find Anatole France speaking generously for masterpieces like *Germinal*, whose epic force had impressed him despite his own love of Hellenism. This recognition occurred long before the personal *rapprochement* which came with the Dreyfus affair.

Of course his antipathy to Zola's naturalism is what we should expect in a dilettante and an Epicurean, a renegade of Naturalism who hated what he had once admired. Classic naturalism, so finely wrought out in French literature of the seventeenth century, he accepts as a humanist, and he loves and strives for the classical ideal of form. Yet by his feelings he leans altogether to the romantic—and openly avows the weakness. He is still a poet, or rather a romanticist—an intellectual romanticist. "Despite all our attempts to be reasonable and to love only the truth, there are times when common reality ceases to satisfy, times when one would like to escape from Nature." As Poe had said, anywhere out of the world! So Anatole France will explore the cosmos in search of supernatural things which

he knows do not exist, and is never happier than when illuminating some miracle of popular legend or mediæval hagiology or modern spiritism. With the same romantic curiosity he will ransack the sciences, choosing of course writers "fond of those generalizations from which a curious mind can draw immediate pleasure and profit." How often, for instance, will his restless imagination find in the marvels of astronomy a new thrill and a new metaphor!

So might one plunder all the universe to store a Palace of Art. Especially for a Muse like Madame de Caillavet, who stirred his pride by her ironies and rewarded his efforts by giving him the best of herself. "You are the only one who can say things that give one a sorrowful thrill," he writes to her, asking for a pebble from the banks of a stream by which she is wandering—"your mountain-torrent which, like all of us, never hears anything but itself." Before publishing his critical articles, he sent them all to her for approval; many of them were composed solely for her. "It is a fact that I can write only to you and that I have a horror of touching the pen." And she was not merely his Egeria, "a marvelous stimulator of his genius"; she brought him incessantly new materials for his pen or his reveries. "She ransacked foreign literature for him," says Madame Pouquet, "she suggested to him the subjects of tales and articles. . . . She

noted down tirelessly all that he said in his chats and idle days, and thus compiled great bundles from which he used to draw." She it was who made him a worker instead of an idle dreamer, who, "by her infinitely intelligent insistence, gave him the habit of writing and almost a taste for it." Finally she even wrote articles which he had only to sign. Thus Madame de Caillavet and the contract France had made with *Le Temps* were his real school of authorship.

And she undoubtedly caused, little by little, the change that came over him in the last two volumes of *La Vie littéraire*, just before he quitted his wife. We have a letter of the novelist Gyp describing this retreat. His patience finally exhausted by the epithet his wife had called him (*cocu*), Anatole France left his home in a dressing gown and skull-cap, with the cord-girdle of his garment trailing behind him, and in his hand his ink-stand and an unfinished article. Life had taught the skeptic and hedonist that "everything in this world must be paid for, and pleasure most of all." He divorced Madame France in 1893.

We have seen that, even before the collapse of his marriage in the larger social life he was leading, Anatole France had revealed in his writings the restlessness that had come over him. Before the end of the second volume of *La Vie littéraire* we find hints of this reaction and a growing desire

to quit his ivory tower too. Take the page in which he depicts the farmers winnowing wheat—a page worthy to set beside the classic prologue of *La Mare au Diable*—and mark the ending: “Oh the joy of accomplishing a fixed and regular task! Shall I know, to-night, whether I have brought home to my granary the good grain? Shall I know whether my words are the bread that giveth life?”

Written during his vacation at Madame de Caillavet’s country place near Bordeaux, these words which crave her approval at close of day only seek that approval as the promise of a larger one. There is, then, for Anatole France an ideal of truth, an ideal for living, unknown to him though it be. And now, guided by a Muse both tactful and sympathetic, he puts a new note into the last half of *La Vie littéraire*, despite the rather significant fact that, after three years of confessing himself to his new Muse, personalia come less readily to his pen. This note is first struck in the review given to Bourget’s novel *Le Disciple*. In these pages Anatole France vehemently defends the right of the thinker to a free expression of his thought, regardless of any practical or moral consequences. “It is thought that rules the world,” he avers, “yesterday’s ideas make the morals of to-morrow.” If he still loves his skeptical poise, still believes with Montaigne that “to die for an idea is to set a pretty high value on conjectures,” none the less he does

virtually deny his old quietism in this statement: "Whoever thinks he possesses the truth must declare it." He knows now, after the cruelties of his divorce, that "life is not innocent"—Monsieur Bergeret will make the same assertion after he, by ignoring his wife's presence and virtually looking through her, has driven her out of his house; he knows, like Monsieur Bergeret, that "we live only by devouring life," that even "thought is an act which partakes of the cruelty inherent in every act." And thus he realizes that, even for a hedonist, passivity is death. Reviewing the career of a forgotten connoisseur, Vivant Denon, he tells us that "sloth is the evening of genuine pleasures"; more significantly even, he discovers "the defect of that fortunate career" in Denon's refusal "to take up arms in any cause."

It is clear that these two essays mark, together with the rupture of his marriage, the turning-point in the development of Anatole France. Through a timidity fostered by his mother and increased by his wife, he had been one of the those described in his first Preface, one "for whom the universe is only ink and paper." Then, when a tactful hand had opened his window upon the present, he had felt a living breeze destroy his quiet and his quietism. He had sought the relief of action; in 1891 he had ended a chapter of hesitations by

his divorce: the skeptic had finally stepped down into the arena.

So, significantly, the last of the essays show him denying his old gods, admitting new deities into his Pantheon. A former Parnassian, he now derides "art for art's sake," contending that "poetry should spring up naturally out of life, like a flower or tree." He admits, with restrictions, the new prosody of Jean Moréas, after having bantered the symbolists two years before. He proposes for the Collège de France chairs of telepathy, socialism, and physical astronomy—to study the canals of Mars. He rallies the mediævalist Péladan on his hatred of patriotism and his disgust for the present. He mocks at the experimental subjectivism of Maurice Barrès, the budding politician, maintaining that "we must not make life an experiment, we must live it." For the third time he returns to the defense of popular writing: "We must keep our minds wide open to life and ideas." And finally, in the last volume, he comes out boldly for the present against the past, affirming that "never has there been an age more interesting to the curious mind, except perhaps the age of Hadrian." How many of these changes, we wonder, were due to the influence of the lady who had made him the center of her salon, and who had determined to make him a member of the French Academy?

But all was not *couleur de rose*: it is not with-

out reason that Baudelaire forbids the ambitious writer any relations with married women. Despite these changes of opinion in Anatole France, his pessimism increases through the last two volumes of *La Vie littéraire*. No illusion gilds for him the present, as it had glorified that Palace of Art where his skepticism had found peace in books and dreams and "the silent orgies of thought." He knows this world of ours for the "drop of mud" that it is; he realizes that even the physical universe offers no hope of better things. He finds it horrible to think that children will become men, sees that the unchanging base of human nature is "tenaciously selfish, jealous, sensual and cruel." He even wonders at times, with Renan, whether life is not an accident, a mold, a planetary disease. And believing all this, disillusioned in his hopes of science, in his belief in history, conscious of the sadness of the everlasting flux, knowing that in much wisdom is much grief, he asks himself every evening with the Preacher: "What profit hath a man of all the labour that he laboureth under the sun?" Yet through it all he retains his confidence in the reason, and in that curious eighteenth century which, believing in progress through reason, inaugurated a new era for humanity. Only his trust is now tempered by experience, by the realization that "things do not move so quickly as we used to think." Convinced, now, that "one must



follow circumstances, use the forces about us, in a word, do what we find to do," the critic who in the Preface of four years before had "blessed books because they made of life a long and gentle childhood," is ready "to throw his books over the wind-mill." He is ready for the joys of action, for his anti-clerical campaign and, after that, his battle by Zola's side in the defense of Dreyfus.



## 6

**H**IS four years of literary journalism had done much for Anatole France. He had learned how to write short sentences. He had learned how to let his pen trot, confident that all his personal ramblings would interest his fair readers. He had learned how to write of men and events of his own day. Like Monsieur Bergeret, he had learned how to act in the world of society which had first dazzled him, how to profit by his newly acquired self-confidence, and how to treat that admiring world lightly, with a certain inconsequence and even with a touch of its own frivolity. He could now make Paris swallow even his pedantries.

These changes were of course due to the devoted Madame de Caillavet. He lunched and dined at her stately mansion in the Avenue Hoche; he had his own desk in her library, and there he worked afternoons under her watchful eye. She was his spur, his gadfly; vainly would he build up a rampart of dictionaries to conceal himself and the fact that he was taking his after-dinner nap!

Madame de Caillavet served him as secretary.

As we have said, she planned his work and compelled him to finish it, ransacking libraries, making translations, jotting down his *bons mots* for future use, giving him no excuse behind which he could shelter his natural indolence, the passivity of a spoiled child, quite content to bury himself in books and leave writing till the morrow. At her receptions and teas, she made him entertain her guests with anecdotes; for her he searched the attic of his memory, dusted its bits of rare old furniture and displayed them, delicately; she groomed his voice and his delivery as she groomed his appearance. She saw that he went to a good tailor; she built up his self-confidence until he almost overcame his stammering. His coarse beard became a defiant imperial; he had his cheeks shaved, and his mustachios, once rough as the hirsute adornments of a provincial professor, assumed the long waxed points and tapering, triumphant sweep which an artist might give to a Parisian incarnation of Mephistopheles. The well-known photograph of Anatole France at this time of his life is the portrait of a genuine *boulevardier* of fifty, even to his fatness and his precocious baldness. And that baldness, later overcome, has also its revelation for us. He was trying his best to be a *boulevardier*. An old schoolmate who had not seen France for many years could well say of him, en-

viously: "Ah! he has been transformed, that book-seller's clerk I knew!"

And now his Muse had made up her mind that he must write novels. No excuse was left him. In 1890 he was persuaded to give up the library post he no longer needed; Madame de Caillavet took off his hands the articles he was writing for *Univers illustré*; she wrote them and he had only to sign his name. *La Vie littéraire* stopped with the fourth volume in 1892; now, with the opera preparing to put *Thaïs* upon the stage, he did not need journalism to keep his name before the public. Thanks to her salon and her grooming, Anatole France was no longer the gentle but somewhat tiresome Sylvestre Bonnard. In her drawing-room the spectator of society had become a man of society, ready to write a novel for his new readers. And novels alone were profitable, as that despised "best seller," *Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard*, had proved.

So he quitted the by-path of criticism in 1892, when collecting the tales he published under the title of *L'Etui de nacre*. We remember that six stories of that collection were staged against a Revolutionary setting. From the drama of history back to the comedy that preceded it—from 1792 back to his beloved Ancien Régime—was no long step for a writer who so admired Voltaire and the liberal thought of the eighteenth century. As Voltaire

wrote his *Candide* to amuse his society readers, so Anatole France wrote *La Rôtisserie de la reine Pédauque*, another *Candide* and filled with reminiscences of that spicy story.

*La Rôtisserie de la reine Pédauque* purports to be an eighteenth-century memoir, written by the student Jacques Tournebroche. His father it is who keeps the cook-shop of Queen Web-foot, with its signboard symbolic of Mother Goose—a redolent hearth where gather the chief characters of this racy tale. Here we find the Abbé Jérôme Coignard, the genial and disreputable humanist, who, for a daily meal, consents to instruct Jacques in the classics. Hither comes the Marquis d'Astarac, an adept of alchemy and the Rosy Cross, to point out a salamander in the flaming fireplace—sure portent, to him, of a mystic's destiny for Jacques. So Astarac takes boy and tutor into his library to translate Greek manuscripts, while he in his laboratory seeks the philosopher's stone and the secret of life. In this temple of learning they meet the Rabbi Mosaïde, who, after sixty years of study spent in the Great Pyramid, explores for the alchemist the lore of the Hebrews and the Egyptians; there, too, they meet Jahel, the old Jew's lovely niece. How Jacques mistakes her for the sylph promised him by Astarac, how he wins her love and loses it to a young nobleman, how student and master are obliged to flee Paris with the lovers

because their drunken revel has ended in unintentional homicide, and how at last the beloved Abbé, struck down in jealousy by Mosaïde, expiates his sins by a death most unctuously Christian—all this must be left to the pages of the story—a masterpiece, although not *virginibus puerisque*. Lovers of Voltaire will certainly not object to a recommendation to read it in the original.

*La Rôtisserie* is a tale of the marvelous—a romance of alchemy and the Rosicrucian philosophy. Pope had used the same theme to furnish the mythology of *The Rape of the Lock*. The Preface of that work thus explains the sect:

“The Rosicrucians are a people I must bring you acquainted with. The best account I know of them is in a French book called *Le Comte de Gabalis*.

. . . According to these gentlemen, the four elements are inhabited by spirits, which they call sylphs, gnomes, nymphs, and salamanders. The gnomes, or demons of earth, delight in mischief; but the sylphs, whose habitation is in the air, are the best-conditioned creatures imaginable; for they say any mortal may enjoy the most intimate familiarities with these gentle spirits, upon a condition very easy for all true adepts, an inviolate preservation of chastity.”

Like Alexander Pope, Anatole France found in *Le Comte de Gabalis* his principal source. He knew this contemporary satire of the Rosicrucians in the

fascinating *Voyages imaginaires* (1788), for Monsieur d'Astarac is sketched after the frontispiece used in this edition. But more important than the source of the story is the romantic curiosity which led Anatole France to the subject: far more significant is this skeptic's interest in the scientific possibility of invisible beings, here or on other planets. Such a choice shows the quality of his imagination, ever seeking escape from reality; for, in spite of his philosophy, he often went to spiritualistic séances. "To believe nothing is to believe everything," in the realm of art.

But it took the imagination which this choice of subject implies, to depict the rational madness of the alchemist Astarac, although his cosmic curiosity and naïve faith in science make him, in a way, an earlier portrait of Anatole France. Imagination and candor alone could have depicted the simple Jacques, and especially the boy's friend and master, Jérôme Coignard. Abbé Coignard is of course the center of the story—a mellow rascal who through all his lapses never loses our sympathy. In his favorite bookshop or in his favorite tavern, translating Zosimus or mingling potations with philosophy, he is always genial; he may indeed break a wine-flask on a lackey's head, but when he repents of his violence he is, as always, the imperturbable sage, and not even the accusation of

cheating at cards can disturb him or spoil his subtly intellectual charm. We love him for his humanity, for the humanities whose grace he breathes, and no scene in the book is more ludicrously typical than the one where Abbé Jérôme, who has fought like a longshoreman in the brawl ending a Bacchic feast, is discovered sitting on the wet margin of a street fountain, cursing the moon for her stingy light, as he searches for a text fitted to their plight in his pocket edition of *De Consolatione Philosophiæ*!

Of course the Abbé Jérôme is the mouthpiece of his "only true begetter." Even the mask of the Bohemian indicates a subconscious wish of the author's; who can sketch a rascal or a vagabond so well as a man cloistered until his forties, a man of books long debarred from Life's great highways? Intellectually, Jérôme Coignard is Anatole France, a mask of philosophic disenchantment, an Epicurus with the heart of a Saint Francis. He too is a skeptic in practical life, with a marvelous leaning toward doubt which inclines him to mistrust even common sense. He too is a sensualist now, despite the disillusion of the senses. He too is a rationalist for, churchman that he is, he "rejects everything contrary to reason except in matters of faith," and when he adds that "here one must believe blindly," we can see that Anatole France is



attacking Christian dogma after the manner of Peter Bayle in his great *Dictionary*.

After dogma, Christian morality has its turn. "Like crows, virtue makes its nest in ruins," observes the good Abbé. "I have only succeeded in smuggling virtue into myself through the breaches made in my constitution by suffering and age. And every time I tried it, too, my spirit was puffed up far less with virtue than with pride. So I keep making to the Creator this prayer : 'God, keep me from virtue, if it withdraw me from holiness.' Ah holiness, that is the thing we can and must attain! There is our true goal. May we reach it some day! In the meantime, more wine!"

Now we understand the purpose of the novel, and the rancor which the author still kept for his priestly teachers. It is—and the fact is rather surprising after the tolerance shown in the essays—a subtle but violent anticlericalism. To contrast the fixity of dogma with the experimentalism of a pioneer in chemistry is not enough for Anatole France; he must bring together faith and skepticism in the same person.<sup>1</sup> But deeper than this is his real motive: the first reaction of an exasperated

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<sup>1</sup> To be sure he had known a priest of that type, if we may believe a page in the second volume of *La Vie littéraire*—a cleric to whom "everything except revelation was subject to doubt." He had also been attacked by the Jesuits—*les petits pères* as he calls them in revenge, and had answered them ironically in his third volume of essays.

dilettante must be, inevitably, a revulsion against the rigors of dogma and the folly of the ascetic ideal.<sup>1</sup>

Coignard, a genuine rationalist, who despises the vulgar prejudice consecrated in human codes, "adores divine law even in its absurdities, which wound our reason only because they are above it." This is the theologian's *credo quia absurdum*: "I believe it because it is absurd." And Anatole France is evidently following Pascal's *Lettres provinciales* in the casuistry of the good Abbé, who maintains that the greatest sinners make the greatest saints, since a moment of contrition changes years of transgression into holiness. To use this as a justification of sinning is diabolically satiric.

In externals, of course, Coignard resembles our old friend Abbé Prévost or the Pangloss of *Candide*. But in spirit he is a new Anatole France, influenced less by Renan than by Voltaire, perhaps because France used Voltaire for much of the

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<sup>1</sup> If we turn back to the last volume of the literary chats, we shall find that just such a reaction is presented there, in the essay on Blaise Pascal. To Anatole France, skeptic and Epicurean, Pascal is a "fanatic"—a zealot who neglected all the humanities of life, who "despised all the arts, even that of writing," who lived in filth, found sensuality in the simplest gastronomic appreciation, "rejoiced at the death of his relatives, if only that death were Christian." With all this, Pascal "kept his religion and his philosophy in water-tight compartments," fearing that reason might enter by surprise into the things of faith. How Anatole France parodies the last trait of the portrait in the religion of Jérôme Coignard!

color of his novel. Like Voltaire, Jérôme and his creator both believe in reason; both champion that free spirit of inquiry which alone strips respectability from old abuses. So the author took the pages left over from this novel and added to them until he made a companion volume, *Les Opinions de Monsieur Jérôme Coignard*. "It is useful to wield the broom a bit wildly in the dark corners," he tells us. "Things unjust or foolish or cruel do not strike us as familiar; we see the faults of our ancestors and not our own." Thus, according to the imaginary editor, *Les Opinions* "should help us to examine our own consciences, to see . . . that our laws are still a lair of injustice, that we esteem riches alone and do not honor labor."

It is the present which the critic is now attacking—the present under the domino of the past. For the Mississippi affair we must read the scandal of Panama, for Rockstrong the politician Rochefort. In fact, the whole book is a *livre à clef*. In these pages Anatole France first reveals a socialistic or radical tendency, but coupled with a pessimism so deep as to view any projected reform of society with alarm. So he prefers old governments, because they are weaker and more tolerant; all the advantage he finds in democracy is the fact that its shifting bourgeois ministries can never combine and carry out a long-plotted war. To him, as to

Voltaire his master, war is a relic of man's barbarism, which he shares with the beasts.

Equally monstrous to him is the idea of human justice and capital punishment. He avers that the very thought of an execution spoils the light of day. He proves that all law is based upon the respect for property—a manifest absurdity when philosophy teaches that man has nothing of his own but life and the power of thought. Yet he has no faith in reform through legislation, no confidence in the return to nature or in the moral goodness of man. "When one wishes to make men good . . . one is inevitably led to wish to kill them all."

A somber pessimism, in fine, colors all the opinions of Jérôme Coignard. Once he had believed in science, like Monsieur d'Astarac, who sees in nature no conflict, no contradiction, since "nothing exists that does not enter into the march of her larger life." But Coignard, finding in science nothing but "spectacles to multiply the illusions of the senses," now "hates her like a mistress whom he has loved too much." "I used to wish to know everything," he tells his pupil, "and to-day I suffer from my guilty madness. . . . An immoderate curiosity dragged me on, my son: in my commerce with books and scholars I have lost the peace of heart, the holy simplicity and the purity of the meek. . . ."

Then, at the very end of the book comes his

illumination. "Tournebroche, my son," reads the last page of *Les Opinions*, "you see me suddenly become uncertain and embarrassed, tongue-tied and stupid at the thought of correcting what I detest. Don't attribute this to timidity of mind; nothing surprises the boldness of my thought. But take heed of what I say, my son: truths discovered by the intellect remain sterile; the heart alone is able to give life to its dreams. . . . It is by feeling that the seeds of good are sown in this world. Reason has no such power; and I must say that, hitherto, I have put too much reliance upon reason. . . . If one is to help mankind, one must reject reason and rise on the wings of enthusiasm."

Anatole France, now living among men—and women—has plainly fallen under the spell of a romantic humanitarianism.

He had first revealed a hint of this interest in *La Vie littéraire*, after he had entered the circle of Madame de Caillavet. But his ideas did not crystallize until he wrote *Le Puits de Sainte-Claire*, published serially in the *Echo de Paris* in 1894. The simple old priest whom we meet in the Prologue of the book is not merely a sort of Abbé Jérôme turned Franciscan, a scholar grown contemptuous of human reason, a Christian socialist moved to mild irony by the comedy of government, justice and militarism; he is a dreamer who even hopes for the redemption of the Devil, a tender-hearted

dreamer who longs for universal peace and the kingdom of God upon earth. It is this modern Saint Francis who, on the margin of Santa Clara's well at Siena, relate the stories that make up *Le Puits de Sainte-Claire*.

With Madame de Caillavet, Anatole France had visited Italy, and the journey provided his backgrounds for these little cameos of the past. Thus, with a new mirror of refraction, he gave a different form to the conflict between paganism and Christianity which, in literature as in his life, had so long concerned his fancy. In *San Satiro* is related the temptation of the poor Franciscan Fra, for whom a pagan tomb gives up a phantom rout of satyrs and elusive nymphs, transformed in his nightmare into toothless hags. Tormented by his vision for many days, the good brother comes at last upon the ghost of San Satiro, a satyr who had lived with the first Galileans, helped them and served them; and whose tomb, consecrated after his demise, had become sanctuary for a myriad of pagan wood-folk, forgotten deities grown tiny and light as the chaff that flies before the winnowing fan.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The story is full of touches from Apuleius; in an earlier volume, Anatole France had once compared the *Golden Ass* to the legends of the Middle Ages. There too he had announced, years before, the theme of *San Satiro*: "Up to the Middle Ages the monks lived in a never-ending spell." But here the whole fairy tale becomes a fable of the eternal passing of the gods, as the phantom satyr-saint tells the poor Franciscan, be-

*San Satiro* thus reminds one of Pater's *Apollo in Picardy*. The fate of forgotten deities fascinated Anatole France as it did Heine before him, for in *Messer Guido Cavaleanti*, a tale inspired by Dante and Boccaccio, another pagan tomb gives up its ghost in a vision, to tell the eager young humanist that in the grave there is no knowledge and to spur to him on the way of learning. But later, "seeing that the purest souls are not without some alloy of terrestrial passion, Messer Guido is seduced by the ambitions of the flesh and the powers of this world," so that his experience of life may be complete, and that he may die knowing that "it is equally useless to think and to act." The ambitions of Messer Guido are of course the ambitions of Anatole France, and his ultimate disillusion seems very like a prophecy.

There is a promise of *La Révolte des Anges* in the tale *Lucifer*, in which the luckless artist who had caricatured the Prince of Darkness learns the real character of the adversary who forsook Heaven to become the ruler of this world. There is a prophecy of Anatole France at sixty-five in *Le joyeux Buffalmacco*, another story inspired by Vasari's *Lives of the Painters*, because it reveals the coarse Rabelaisian humor of *L'Ile des pingouins*. And there is a promise of France's humani-

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fore he dies suffocated by the sponge the vengeful witches had put in place of his heart.

tarianism in *Les Pains noirs*, the story of a selfish banker who finds salvation because he had tossed a few loaves of black bread to the poor.

But the masterpiece of the series is its longest story, *L'Humaine tragédie*. In *Jérôme Coignard*, two years before, Anatole France had indicated his turning from universal indulgence to a militant skepticism. Then, during his trip to Italy, reliving in art an age of ignorance and faith, he grew regretful of his childish belief, glimpsed again in the figure of Saint Francis. Now he must justify the intellectual curiosity which has destroyed those things within him, in order to console himself for their loss. Hence the "human tragedy," the story of Fra Giovanni of Viterbo.

Humblest of Franciscan friars, the playmate of children and the friend of beggars and lepers, fearing to think—"for thought is evil"—Brother Giovanni knows all the joys of lowliness and ignorance, and being happy, is proof against the temptations of the Adversary. "For a man's thoughts are only stirred by sorrow, and his meditations by grief. Then, tortured by fears and desires, he turns anxiously in his bed, and rends his pillow of lies."

So it happens with this simple-hearted child of God. An angel touches his lips with a burning coal, loosens his tongue that he may proclaim the Word of Life. Fra Giovanni goes forth to preach charity and poverty and human brotherhood on



earth, talks with a laborer and comes to see that society is ruled by oppression and property rights, and that the poor man is bound to defend the good things belonging to the rich. He declares the iniquity of the laws and is cast into prison, but he consoles himself for his treatment by the thought that he will die for Truth. Then One appears to him to show him the nature of that Truth for which he would die, tells him that Truth is white but not pure, and shows him the vision of a vast wheel, like the rose window of a cathedral, made of numberless moving figures, men of all sorts and conditions, each with a scroll of a different color issuing from his lips. Fra Giovanni reads these scrolls various in matter as in hue, and finds among them none that does not contradict the others, but every device ends in the words: "Such is the Truth."

And while he sighs at their contrariety, marveling at the heretics and Arabs and Jews and atheists who find places on the wheel, seeking in vain one scroll of white to console him for the blood-red motto of the Pope—when he calls at last for pure Truth, the Truth for which he is to die, behold! the wheel begins to revolve. Faster and faster it turns, until the devices show only as circles, until the circles themselves disappear, until at last the huge disk looms before him like the moon, white and stainless and dazzling. And he hears a

voice crying: "Gaze now upon that white Truth which you wished to know."

Thus the Devil destroys within him the desire for martyrdom. Then he leads the prisoner away with him to the hills, gives him to eat of the Apple and reveals to him the beauty and sadness of life. Fra Giovanni recognizes his tempter and teacher, but knowing that he has given him to feel and will and suffer, taught him to know life as it is, he is conscious that his heart turns toward his teacher in gratitude and love.

The personal note revealed in this story is as plain as the moral of the epilogue, told with a simplicity and a depth of feeling which prove it a confession. Plainly Anatole France has found in Italy a new evangel and a new hero; he has been touched alike by humanitarianism and by the moral beauty of Saint Francis. Now, of course, his radicalism—his idealistic anarchism—is a wholly theoretic and literary belief. We must not strike the wicked, lest we make ourselves like them; we must oppose to force not force but gentleness. And it is interesting to compare the Tolstoyan mildness of this doctrine—Tolstoy was then much discussed in Parisian salons—with the later speeches of Anatole France, when the Dreyfus affair had destroyed his poise and made him an active enemy of Church and army.

Compared with *L'Humaine tragédie*, its companion volume of 1894 puzzles the reader. Soul and

senses—never was contrast drawn so sharply as between these tales and the troubling pages of *Le Lys rouge*. But for years Madame de Caillavet had urged her literary “lion” to write a society novel; such as Bourget wrote; she wished him to prove his worldliness and sophistication—that is why this book takes us into so different an atmosphere. Instead of the good Fra, a dreamer who feared to doubt, we have here doubters who have all but lost the power to dream; against the purity of the triple vow we have the theme of a double adultery. No devil in *Le Lys rouge*, but in his stead disillusion, idleness and the emptiness of life without a task. It is ennui that drives the heroine Thérèse, cultured and sensuous and cynically positivistic (probably a portrait of Madame de Caillavet), to leave Paris for Italy, leave the commonplace physical bond of her first infidelity for the artist whose love means a new nepenthe for her restless desires. Thus the background of the story connects it with the preceding volume, Siena being changed to Florence, whose adoptive lilies explain the puzzling title. At Santa Maria Novella, at the convent of San Marco, on the hill of Fiesole, the scene is already set for an artist’s passion, with all the monuments of a noble past to lend their beauty to the lovers’ hour of joy.

Indeed this background is marvelous. It was “got up” in Italy by Madame de Caillavet; during their journey she took the notes for the staging of the

story. She also gave her admirer what help he needed to depict his society folk, whose real inner lives were still mysterious to him, as we can see later by Professor Bergeret's observations upon "le monde." And perhaps this background is the best part of the novel, which is episodic, digressive and lacking in unity and characterization. Exquisite bits of landscape, vistas rich in a double atmosphere of time and space, sketched in a phrase yet full of delicately complex beauty, gleam and tantalize through the long weary intrigue of love and jealousy; and one carries away the vision of a theater more precious than the comedy. All the charm of mystic Italy, the Italy of Dante and Saint Francis, all the candor of a bygone age, relieves the pervasive skepticism of the ultramodern actors, worthy companions of the cynical and disillusioned Thérèse. Only two are idealists, the sentimental English poetess enamored of Renaissance art, and the vagabond poet Choulette, dreaming Catholic lyrics and preaching Christian socialism in the intervals of a life filled with debauch and repentance. But Miss Bell, with her affected French and her Pre-Raphaelite verses, is a caricature of an English blue-stockings; and Choulette the sinner-saint, the mad weak lovable dreamer, is an old Parnassian associate of the author, the inimitable Paul Verlaine.

Now and again Choulette reminds one of other

figures, such as Villiers de l'Isle-Adam and Gérard de Nerval. He has something too of Anatole France. His admiration for Saint Francis, his sympathy with the lowly and outcast of society, his contempt of human laws, "which forbid the rich as well as the poor to sleep under bridges, beg or steal," are all traits grown familiar before we hear them on this satyr's lips. But it is he who remarks that "only desire and idleness make us sad," and who tells the heroine that the love of the senses is alloyed with anger, selfishness and hate.

This perhaps is the moral of the story. For after Thérèse wins her sculptor, after she has learned from him (like Fra Giovanni) "the delicate joy and sadness of thought," she loses him because of her former lover. And the book becomes a "psychology of jealousy"—the jealousy of a morbid, sensitive artist-mind, crystallized in the despairing cry of the final scene: "I see the other one with you all the time." What "other one," we ask, except the rival of the author—the husband?

Thérèse sums up a philosophy in her epigram, "Souls are impenetrable to souls." Before her, Jérôme Coignard had said that—and he did not invent the phrase. Here it is Paul Vence the critic, disciple of Renan and preacher of irony and pity, who takes the place of the Abbé. Paul Vence, man of the world as the author would now consider himself, Paul Vence the skeptic and author of a

socialistic novel, is a portrait of Anatole France as "Madame" had transformed him; the soiled old cassock had only been the picturesquely satiric domino of his first venture into realistic art.

Thus *Le Lys rouge* marks a step toward the final realism of *L'Orme du mail* and the rest of *Histoire contemporaine*. First of his real creations—for his 'prentice novels are imitative and *Sylvestre Bonnard* a subjective portrait of a youthful ideal—came *Balthazar* and *Thaïs*, purely romantic as the *Salammbô* of Flaubert. Grown more bitter toward the Church but still genial, Anatole France created Jérôme Coignard, a product of that inverted romanticism which finds food for its curiosity in the picaresque. Then he portrayed modern society into which he had entered so late in life; portrayed it not as the pure realist or naturalist of *Histoire contemporaine*, but as an idealist who, reviewing the novels of Gyp in *La Vie littéraire*, had looked with longing on the delights of this world, at the pageantry of life among those for whom life is in itself an end. Now he knew something of that aristocratic world, and in its loves and pleasures had found only further disillusion. Hence the bitterness of his story, with its acrid cynical after-taste of disenchantment. And as Gyp's novels once sent him back to his study content, so now he turns to his philosophy, drawing from the world of *Le*

*Lys rouge* its lesson, the lesson he gives us in the placid pessimism of *Le jardin d'Epicure*.

In *Le jardin d'Epicure* are gathered the most distinctive thoughts of Anatole France, the best of all he had published up to 1894, the flower of his skeptical reflection on life and the world. At fifty he draws up a philosophic balance-sheet, an epicurean anthology. It is a living, changing album, portraying not merely the dilettante of *La Vie littéraire*, not merely the skeptic who denies all science, all objective truth, but the new Anatole France, alive to the world's injustice, guided by irony and pity for men, curious of a future in which he would like to believe. Certainly his new environment and his new Egeria have changed him. Thanks to "Madame," he is now interested in humanity as well as in the humanities. Now he admits that we live too much in books, that life is action and that "even the pleasures of the intellect begin only when one sees their relation to life and to one's fellow-men." Now he knows that life is worthless if we do not live it, that there is no innocence in renouncing action, that thought itself is an act; and his smiling fatalism is tempered by a gleam of hope. Like Nietzsche, he would hope "not in humanity, but in those inconceivable creatures which will some day spring from man, as man himself has sprung from the brute. Let us put our hope in them, let us hope in that travail of

the universe which finds its physical law in evolution. For this fruitful travail we can feel increasing in our own breasts, keeping us marching toward a goal inevitable and divine."

So, with imagination still luring him onward, the philosopher of the Palace of Art is not turned into an absolute pessimist by his contact with life. Without illusions as to his importance, for like Jérôme Coignard he does not exempt himself from the irony and pity he would accord to men, Anatole France is ready, like Candide, to "cultivate his garden." And this resignation is no coward's virtue. Through all the bitterness of doubt, in a universe filled with evil, he calmly rears his pyre of hopes beneath the empty sky, snatching from pessimism itself a torch of courage, a torch which burns with gloomy magnificence through the nihilism of *Le jardin d'Epicure*.





## 7

IN 1896 Madame de Caillavet had the joy of seeing her literary lion, who fifteen years before had been absolutely unknown, elected to the French Academy. Her labors for nearly a decade were justified, and a decade of devotion may well authorize further testimony to her share in the success of Anatole France.

"Her whole ambition was his glory, writes one<sup>1</sup> who knew them both during those years; "for it she toiled with tenacious purpose: she was the manager of his genius. Her unremitting pressure pushed and maintained him in the straight path. . . . She drew from him treasures which in his nonchalance he perhaps did not know that he possessed. She lined with wadding the life of that lover of ease, gave that timid fellow poise, organized the material existence of that grown child, whom she loved to spoil, smoothed every highway under his feet; she was his will-power and his conscience."

Thanks to her, Anatole France now knew many

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<sup>1</sup> M. Emile Hovelague.

charming and cultured people. He had bought a house, number 5 in the Villa Saïd, a closed street near the Bois de Boulogne, and filled it with the art treasures they had collected in their ramblings through Paris, France and southern Europe. He had virtually become one of her family, accepted rather than tolerated by her wealthy and fatuous husband. Every spring he was invited to share long cruises on their steam yacht; with her he visited in 1896, Corsica, Sardinia, Sicily and Italy. Later cruises took them to the Adriatic, to the shores of Greece, to Athens and Constantinople, and to Germany. Thus they explored all the great art galleries of Europe. Then, after these delightful Odysseys, he would accompany his lady to Capian, her summer home near Bordeaux. Winters, as we have seen, he worked every day in the library of her residence at Paris, Avenue Hoche. Thus in scarcely nine years he had written twelve volumes.

In 1896 there were two vacant chairs in the French Academy. France was induced to present himself as candidate for the chair of the late Ferdinand de Lesseps, who had left his mark upon the world by digging the Suez Canal. Elections to the Academy are no less puzzling to Anglo-Saxons than the combinations of French politics; in choosing a successor to de Lesseps, the conservatives, who wished to place their own candidate in the other vacant chair, were induced to give their suffrage

to the candidate of the liberals. So the future radical, already revealed in many a page of *Les Opinions de M. Jérôme Coignard*, was received among the Forty. The critic who had rallied the Academy upon their fallibility became one of the Immortals he had derided.<sup>1</sup>

He continued to deride them. He disrupted one of their sessions, convoked to revise the great dictionary, by urging the aristocratic Henri de Bornier to rise and insist that the meanings of the word "anneau" must be extended to include the unmentionable significance given it in Rabelais' story of Hans Carvel. He refused to take the Academicians seriously. Utterly bored by the meetings, when in 1910 he learned that certain of the bigwigs were made uneasy by his presence there, he ceased his rare visits entirely. But the title-pages of all his books continued to bear the phrase "Membre de l'Académie française," and these magic words on his visiting cards, if we may believe Brousson, had their usefulness in extricating him from certain extremely delicate situations.

An Immortal now, with his position secure, the famous author of *Le Lys rouge* began to mingle even more directly with the affairs of men: every schoolboy knows that action no less than emotion is an imprescriptible right of the Immortals.

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<sup>1</sup> Neither his mother nor his father lived to enjoy this triumph: the former had died ten years before, the latter, six.

So the god of literary Paris came down to earth, to the world of his own day. Almost immediately he published *L'Orme du mail* and *Le Mannequin d'osier*, the first two volumes of a series called *Histoire contemporaine*. This is not a history; it is not even a story; it is a chain of episodes and conversations bearing on questions of the day. First written week by week for a newspaper, then gathered into books like the earlier essays, these scenes of contemporary manners have every quality except a plot; each chapter stands by itself, a "slice of life" which is also a criticism of life. Begun as journalism, the work became a new form of fiction; and no four volumes bound down to a plot could have painted this living panorama of provincial prejudice and dullness and petty intrigue. Published while the events it satirizes were going on, it is not merely realism: it is life dissected in the making. A bitter impassive irony, like Flaubert's in *L'Education sentimentale*, runs through these contemporary drawings, etched deeply as by some new *aqua fortis*, gloomy as Zola, but lifted far above his work by selective vision and style. Zola had ignored half of life, sunk the mind in the body; here we have both sides of man's existence, and even sensation becomes material for subtly ironic thought.

This picture of provincial life is largely a group portrait defined in dialogue. The city described is

said to be Toulouse, but it seems far more likely to be Pau that supplied most of the background. As for the actors, where could he meet them so readily as in the salon of Madame de Caillavet, since Paris attracts every type of provincial? All classes are presented, from the archbishop and the prefect down to the cobbler and the vagabond—a kaleidoscope of prejudice and selfishness dissolving into absurdity at each turn of the author's hand. Only petty interests absorb this community, where intellectual stagnation views with suspicion all those who submit its prejudices to reason. But if the events described are trivial, they are pregnant with meaning for the student of French history; future research may find in *Histoire contemporaine* the most valuable of the works of Anatole France.

What are the portraits in this unintentional masterpiece? First the clerics—around the corner always lurks a cassock. There is the diplomatic archbishop, a man of the world who entertains state dignitaries with game purchased from a poacher. There is the papal nuncio, a passionless automaton, receiving the rival candidates with the same questions, the same replies. There is the retired army chaplain, who sees the ruin of the military virtues in the decline of faith; there is the young priest infatuated with hunting, and the old priest eager to get into print. But it is the contest for the bishop's ring, running through three vol-

umes of the story, which gives us the best of these clerical portraits: Lantaigne, the superior of the Seminary, and his rival Guitrel. Orthodox, and fiery, Lantaigne is the type of the uncompromising cleric; his character is painted in his dismissal of a favorite pupil suspected of weakness of faith. Against him plots the Abbé Guitrel, tactful and shrewd and dissimulating, trafficking in influence as he traffics in ecclesiastical vestments to deck the parlors of the Jewish prefect's wife. Thus Guitrel lays the foundations of his future bishopric, winning the favor of Cæsar by rendering to him the things that are not his. The curio-hunting Jewess, who sends her daughter to a Catholic convent, is a portrait worthy of Flaubert; so too is the oily, jovial, Jewish prefect. Anatole France despises Worms-Clavelin who "listens with his mouth," hates this anti-Semite and turncoat, contemptuous of creeds as of parties, whose prototype he undoubtedly met in lady's salon.

Thus Jew and Christian alike are held up to ridicule. There is, however, a friendly touch in the portrait of Lantaigne. Human if not humane, the sturdy Father Superior wins our sympathy by his intellectual honesty. Under the elm tree on the mall (*L'Orme du mail*), he talks with Professor Bergeret, who is calmly agnostic but fond of general ideas like himself; they discuss the relativity of truth, the inspiration of Joan of Arc, democracy

and militarism; and the reader discovers in the pessimistic Bergeret the third incarnation of Anatole France.

Skeptical of the Absolute and the supernatural, doubtful of human progress, Bergeret is not yet a reformer: he finds the Republic tolerant, easy to live under, careless of military glory and too variable to plot a world war. The professor is at first a passive critic, judging the present in the light of human experience and his own pessimism. At Paillot's bookshop, where he occupies one of the academic chairs in the second-hand book corner, gather Bergeret's other auditors; and here he draws from the murder committed next door a placid commentary on man's natural ferocity and war's legalized carnage. Here too he meets the old Chief-Justice, so confident in the infallibility of legal procedure, whose life story stirs the quiet scholar to an expression of horrified doubt. Clearly, when writing this chapter France has already taken sides in the Dreyfus affair, despite the fact that in 1887 he had been a monarchist and a partisan of General Boulanger and the army.

Bergeret's misfortunes soon begin. As a critic of contemporary politics, assailing the triple domination of priest, soldier, and financier, the professor is hated by Republicans and clericals alike. Timid and untactful, he suffers in his university, making enemies of his rector and his dean. And

with all this he suffers in his home, having married the wife so often chosen by—or choosing—his kind. Practical, uneducated, and proudly ignorant, his Xantippe sees in her lord only a weak incapable dreamer, and as she does not understand him, she has always despised him. Finally, she treats him as Venus did Vulcan—to borrow the euphemism of a French critic—regardless of her matronly unfitness to play the rôle of the Cytherean queen.

The Vulcanization of Monsieur Bergeret is the chief episode of the second volume of the series, *Le Mannequin d'osier*, and there is little doubt that this episode is drawn from the life of the author. He too had suffered from a "wicker-work woman," the dummy upon which Madame Bergeret drapes her dresses. He too had found it once too often in his room, and destroyed it as Bergeret destroyed his wife's dress-model.

So France takes from this dummy the title of his novel. Despite her husband's remonstrances, Madame Bergeret has shoved the figure out of her way into the professor's damp and dismal study. Headless and heartless, it stands against his bookcase of Latin poets, a wooden lady, a hymeneal symbol. To this study comes the young soldier and former pupil who serves as Mars in the story, and Bergeret deals his thrusts at militarism and that folly of armaments which must end only in war or



bankruptcy. His wife enters, and the scene that follows clamors for quotation:

“Monsieur Roux removed Freund’s *Dictionary* from an old armchair and gave a seat to Madame Bergeret. Turn by turn, Monsieur Bergeret contemplated the quartos pushed against the wall, and Madame Bergeret who had taken their place in the armchair, and reflected that these two groups of matter, differentiated as they then were and so diverse in appearance, nature, and use, had presented an original similarity—a similarity long maintained, when both the dictionary and the lady were still floating in a gaseous state in the primitive nebula.

“ ‘For after all,’ he said to himself, ‘Madame Bergeret floated about in the infinite of time, shapeless, unconscious, diffused in flickering gleams of oxygen and carbon. The molecules which were to make up this Latin dictionary circled at the same time, for ages, in this same nebula, which was to bring forth monsters, insects, and a little thought.<sup>1</sup> It has taken an eternity to produce my dictionary and my wife, monuments of my painful existence, creations defective and at times annoying. My dictionary is full of mistakes. Amelia’s coarse body contains an even coarser soul. That is why we can scarcely hope that a new eternity will some day

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<sup>1</sup> The idea is not original; it comes from Diderot.

create Knowledge and Beauty. We live for a moment and we should gain nothing by living forever. It is neither time nor space that Nature lacks, and we behold her handiwork!

"And Monsieur Bergeret still asked his restless soul: 'But what is time, except the very movements of Nature, and can I say that they are long or short? Nature is cruel and commonplace. But whence comes it that I know it? And how can I stand outside of Nature to know her and to judge her? I might have a better opinion of the universe if I held a different place in it.' "

One would like to quote from the reflections of Monsieur Bergeret after he has discovered his betrayal, and analyzed his cowardice before the facts. Searching his soul, he falls at last upon the origins of modesty—a spiritual experience as convincing as any page of Bourget, and so realistic that it may well be a confession. Nowhere is the man of books and the weakling so pitilessly presented to a world of action; yet Bergeret wins his ends by the very passivity of his revenge. He ignores his wife, treats her like a ghost, makes her doubt her own existence in his absolute disregard, until at last she leaves her husband. This ludicrous but effective vengeance had been used by the author to eliminate his own "better half" some years before.

"Vivre c'est détruire. Agir c'est nuire." So Bergeret finds that his abstention from action is itself

a force that hurts, and realizes, with comic pride, that he too is a destructive animal in a world of carnage. Soon he will know that even thoughts are acts, may become acts: the antimilitarism of the novel promises the author's defense of Dreyfus. "We must give soldiers uniforms and gold braid. The least we can do is to flatter those whom we send out to be shot." He denounces the military code, the court-martial, "fit only for a chamber of horrors in a museum." A pacifist, he can hope only that war may be staved off. "A socialistic Europe will probably be friendly to peace. For there will be a socialistic Europe, Monsieur l'Abbé," says he to Lantaigne, "if indeed we may call socialism that unknown power which is approaching."

Evidently Bergeret has changed—like Anatole France—and for similar reasons. Domestic sufferings have made him more objective. The scholar has left his study and gone out into the streets, where he has seen the life of the unfortunate and the oppressed. Hence the social pity in the brilliant sketch of the wayfarer Pied d'Alouette, the pity and irony combined in the portrait of the cobbler Piedagnel. Only a living experience could have written these chapters; a heart once thrilled by the story of Saint Francis here touches life itself, to draw from its bleeding core a lesson of universal love.

The professor's spectator-phase is ending. Ber-

geret does not at first adopt a party and range himself with the anticlericals of his sympathies. But events in France are forcing him to enter a party. The chief of these events was the famous Dreyfus affair.

Accused of selling military secrets to Germany, a young captain of artillery had been condemned behind closed doors by a court-martial, and now, after a public degradation, was paying in exile for the honor of the army and the misfortune of his Jewish birth. As usual, the country was "betrayed," and at first no one questioned the justice of the verdict. But Dreyfus' friends were active and did not rest until they had interested the public in this violation of human rights. Hence the constant satire of the military code in *Histoire contemporaine*. Published in an anti-Dreyfusard journal (*L'Echo de Paris*),<sup>1</sup> these pages still molded opinion: intelligent readers knew how to take their ironic detachment, and even the literal might here read both sides of the question involved.

Meanwhile, the heroic Colonel Picquart had tried to reopen the case, only to be sent to Tunis for his pains. Scheurer-Kestner, vice-president of the Senate, had also failed. Esterhazy, suspected by Picquart, was triumphantly whitewashed; Picquart was arrested, and Emile Zola published on the thir-

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<sup>1</sup> Afterwards in the *Figaro*.

teenth of January, 1898, his charge against the judges of Dreyfus and Esterhazy. Even this daring letter, every paragraph of which begins, *J'accuse*, failed of immediate effect; Zola was condemned; the Minister of War brought forth new "proofs," got the Chamber of Deputies to ratify the judgment of the court-martial; and when Picquart declared that these so-called proofs were irrelevant and false, he found himself arrested again.

Then came the confession of the original forgery by Colonel Henry, successor to Picquart on the General Staff. Esterhazy now confessed: he had forged the first "evidence" used against the victim. Thereupon the Cour de Cassation—or Court of Appeals—annulled the decision of the court-martial and ordered a second military trial, which began at Rennes in August, 1899. The honor of the army was saved; Dreyfus was declared "guilty with extenuating circumstances," and pardoned by President Loubet. Dreyfus and his party claimed exoneration, but laws were passed to prevent reopening the case, and it was not until six years later that the Cour de Cassation revised the verdict and Dreyfus was reinstated in the army.

Many will remember the echoes of this drama, which resounded over the civilized world. In Paris the "affair" provoked a veritable explosion. Party feeling flamed higher than it had done since the days of the Commune: Dreyfusards everywhere

were denounced as traitors to their country. The last two volumes of *Histoire contemporaine* show how this storm of hatred spread through the provinces, to the stagnant little city described there, and invaded the peace-loving heart of Professor Bergeret. And in his sufferings, in his ferocious pessimism and irony, we may read the sufferings of Anatole France, who from the beginning stood with Zola and his little band of *intellectuels*.

*L'Anneau d'améthyste* first presents us to the anti-Dreyfusards. They are Guitrel, the abbé; the Royalist and anti-Semite Duc de Brécé; Lerond, the ex-judge, now pleading for the congregations; and the old general whom we have already met at his desk, commanding an army of soldiers in his boxes of namecards. All of them condemn Dreyfus, and with him the traitors who call for revision; all think these "Freemasons, anticlericals, and Jews" the real enemies of France. This is the litany we hear in the chapel of the Catholic Duke, in his château where black-robed ladies knit beneath the portraits of their ancestors and Bourbon princes; and even the fair Jewish widow of the neighboring estate, eager to enter this aristocratic circle, shares the anti-Dreyfusard violence of her soldier lover. Under her roof Guitrel reappears, still pulling wires for his bishopric; we meet her crafty, egoistic, degenerate son. Now a new thread is brought into the weft, for this little Jew wants to be admitted

to the hunting parties of the Duke, and to obtain this favor gives his support to the Abbé. Then the story returns to Monsieur Bergeret.

Freed at last from his wife, Bergeret would resign himself to life as it is. But since his attitude provokes general reprobation, since he is left alone in his martyrdom, his good housekeeper bethinks herself of bringing to her master a stray dog, in the hope that he may lighten the scholar's loneliness. Not to spoil by quotation this delightful chapter, the half-discouraged professor, "qui n'était pas triste," makes acquaintance with Riquet, through an accident which reveals the affection of his canine friend. Henceforth, the pages where Riquet appears are the best in the book, for he alone can evoke indulgence in a novelist embittered by his participation in the "affair."

For Monsieur Bergeret, progressively idealized from the beginning, we may substitute Anatole France. Urged by Madame de Caillavet, he too had already supported Dreyfus indirectly. Then, provoked beyond measure by later developments, he found irony insufficient, and signed with the first the petition for revision which appeared on the morrow of Zola's letter *J'accuse*. This *Protestation des Intellectuels* brought to its signers all the hatred of the mob. Visitors to Paris in 1898 will remember the mass-meetings, the violence of the

press, the battle waged against this new Leonidas and his little group.

Hence the note of pessimism sounded so early in *L'Anneau d'améthyste*. Discouraged by his first encounter with real life, the author decides that action, too, is vain. "Work amuses our vanity," he tells us, "work deceives our impotence and gives us the hope of some good result. We flatter ourselves that it helps us control destiny. Not understanding the necessary relations which bind our efforts to the mechanics of the universe, it seems to us that this effort is directed in our favor against the rest of the machine. Work gives us the illusion of will, of strength and independence. It makes us divine in our own eyes." And he evidently views humanity as pessimistically as Monsieur Bergeret in his library beset by the mob. "Pecus is fed fat with ancient lies. He clings to error—error that he has tested. He is imitative and would appear more so, if he did not deform what he imitates, These deformations produce what we call progress."

Bergeret, while stones are crashing through his library window, certainly has his own reasons to be pessimistic. But soon comes an event which renews his power of self-illusion. Promoted at last to a professorship at Paris—in which we may readily see the author's election to the Academy, which he affected to despise—our hero finds "a



joy greater than might have seemed consonant with his progress in ataraxy." The cynic who had called life a leprosy, a disease, who had rejoiced to think it a pure terrestrial accident, now tells his favorite pupil of his belief in the inhabitants of the stars. "He peoples the empty sky, because he has been made a professor. Monsieur Bergeret is a philosopher, but he is also a man."

So the novel, *L'Anneau d'améthyste*, progresses to its end. Guitrel gets his bishopric, supported as he is by women and influential Jews, and promptly turns against the State in support of the over-taxed congregations. The wealthy anti-Semite Jewess loses her soldier lover, implicated in the forgeries of the "affair." Professor Bergeret, invited to give a course in the Sorbonne, prepares to quit the town which his departure transmutes for him into a mere empty image. And we close the third volume of *Histoire contemporaine*, struck by the sociologic character of its dialogues. Madame de Caillavet had done more than socially civilize her protégé; she had interested him in life and politics.

*L'Anneau d'améthyste* is the climax of this essay in realism. Lacking in plot, the story scarcely allows a new Parisian background; *Monsieur Bergeret à Paris* (1901) seems rather like a sixth act in a play. The plotting of the royalists, the nationalist movement, are, to be sure, sequels of the "affair," but the reader wearies of politics, of its turn-

coat climbers, of women who sell themselves for political ends, of the whole cynical farce of opportunism hidden in filthy backstairs behind the posters of the tricolor.

The early chapters of *Monsieur Bergeret à Paris* are written in the tenderly reminiscent manner of *Le Livre de mon ami*. Transferred to the capital, the scholar finds at last a livable apartment, though he hates apartments for the uniformity of their multicellular life. Once more he gathers about him his wandering Penates; and in his new study, talking with the carpenter busy at some new bookshelves, he first reaps a word of praise for his martyrdom.

Even the self-centered—if true Epicureans—must find out the joys of altruism. None the less, this altruism does not make Bergeret an optimist: he knows that “to live without illusions is the secret of happiness.” But he draws some consolation out of man’s emergence from original savagery—a promise from the past for an equally distant future. Evil must always exist as the necessary complement of good; still man may at least rid society of artificial evil, find for human slavery a substitute in machinery, in the unknown energy of the electric spark. Then the masters of the machine will be content with the honor of directing it, and wages and profits will all be done away.

Of course, this is simply the theory of com-

munism. But "are not the best things of life common to all?" To air and light, our primitive dowry from Nature, have we not already added the roads, the rivers, the royal parks, the libraries, and the art galleries? Certainly communism will improve at least some of the conditions of life; so the professor will give his hand and his faith to the task of improvement. "We must work at the future like the weavers of high-warp tapestry, without seeing what we are weaving."

We are not surprised to find Anatole France now ready to carry his new truth to the people. Drawn at last into the streets, the man of letters was easily induced to mount the tribune of reform. He began to take the chair at workingmen's dinners and gatherings and election-meetings, he consented to speak to socialists and radicals and students, to add his word wherever men dreamed generous dreams for France. Eager to escape from thought into action, he tried to do his share in the secular task of progress, sure that "slowly, but inevitably, humanity will bring to realization its sages' dreams."



## 8

THE Dreyfus affair brought many cares to Anatole France—no peace-loving Epicurean enjoys hearing the mob “conspue” his name and his integrity. And he was to suffer further obloquy in the days which followed, when he took part in the campaign against the nationalists and the clericals, helped to drive out the teaching congregations, and wrote his pamphlet in favor of disestablishing the Church. There were compensations, however: with a well-filled purse one may minimize contacts with Pecus, smooth the road of the traveler and even the rough path to Parnassus. In these years Madame de Caillavet acquired a perfect maid and traveling-companion, who brought a new harmony into their wanderings, and Anatole France added to his service a perfect secretary.

Madame de Caillavet’s “find” was Mademoiselle Emma Laprévotte, the lady who a score of years later was to become the legal wife of the master. Mademoiselle entered the household of Madame de Caillavet in 1898, when she accompanied her party on the voyage to Greece made during the

spring of that year. "Madame" was quite as heedless of material details as her great man: questions of hotels, bills, luggage, etc., were as maddening to her as to him; trains were missed and disputes ensued—avoidable disputes piled on top of those which a decade of intimacy had rendered inevitable. Mademoiselle Laprévotte used her tact and foresight to clear away these obstacles to peace and keep the horizon clear. So clever was she that they called her Mademoiselle Perfection. No doubt it was she who during a storm in the Mediterranean, when France insisted upon remaining on deck despite all remonstrances and the danger of being swept away, suggested that he be tied to the mast. Here he recited verses until the sailors thought him insane.

Three years later Anatole France discovered his "perfect secretary," Jean-Jacques Brousson. France had decided to go on with the *Life of Joan of Arc*, for which he had gathered a farrago of notes—a project that was halted by a lost reference. The task of finding the reference and working up the subject was intrusted to young Brousson, a very well-trained scholar and sufficiently apt to master in a short time all of his employer's tricks of style. For eight years Brousson was to have a considerable share in the life of the house in the Villa Saïd. He was to collect notes for his master, search the libraries for plots from history, accompany him in his

ramblings through Paris, carry his books and his packages—all for the modest wage of twenty dollars a month. He brought youth into the old house stuffed with curiosities and *objets d'art*, where Anatole France lived rigidly governed by his old housekeeper, Josephine Boccard.

Not that the life of the novelist had been wholly serious before his advent. Even in his literary activities! "One must sometimes seek distraction from the affairs of to-day," Monsieur Bergeret had said, explaining the rather free fables in sixteenth-century French which adorn the last volumes of *Histoire contemporaine*. And during the troublous years from 1896 to 1901 Anatole France had also found a mild distraction in two volumes we must now consider, *Pierre Nozière* and *Clio*.

Both volumes preceded *Monsieur Bergeret à Paris*. Both may be classified as digressions; and if *Clio*, a collection of historical tales, naturally falls in our next chapter, the reminiscent *Pierre Nozière* demands treatment in this one. From now on we must be prepared for books like this, second harvests of memories; no reader of *Pierre Nozière* will be sorry to find the book a companion volume to *Le Livre de mon ami*, or regret that the old Anatole France has not entirely passed away in the new.

A truce to satire! The tired publicist now returns to his youth, to the old Bible and its quaint

woodcuts, to the mother who told such charming stories to her little boy. He tells us of his nurse and her scapegrace husband, of the old curio merchant, of the bookseller of the quays. He draws the portrait of his first editor, sketches again the two artist comrades of *Le Chat maigre*. Then, as in the case of *Le Livre de mon ami*, his vein suddenly runs dry in mid-career; narration gives way to fragmentary impressions or memories, "Notes written by Pierre Nozière on the margins of his big Plutarch."

The last half of the volume is filled with travel-impressions evidently drawn from some old travel-diary, *Promenades de Pierre Nozière en France*. His summer vacations with "Madame" have taken him to Pierrefonds, Vernon, Eu, and other corners of Picardy, Normandy and Brittany; and the result is a delightful journal, mingled with saintly legend and bits of mediæval story. "For cities are like books, beautiful picture-books in which our forefathers are seen." Standing before their time-worn pages of stone, the earlier Anatole France is born again—the poet who regrets the sacred groves and springs, the pagan gods and cults surviving only as local superstitions. "As long as there are woods, meadows, and mountains, lakes and rivers, as long as the white vapors of the morning still rise from the streams, there will be nymphs and dryads, there will be fairies. They are the

beauty of this world: that is why they will never pass away."

Delightful too are the chapters on the country fairs, on the fisher-folk of Brittany. Here, by the somber ocean of the Baie des Trépassés, he is moved to write a long reverie on the Odyssey, perfect as the finest pages of *La Vie littéraire*, and prophetic of *Clio* in its tenderly vivid realism. Thus, even on the farthest rocks of Finisterre, he finds the beauty that he brings to them. Not merely an artist, but a real patriot, he lovingly describes each town or city of his wanderings, reading its history in the old stones which he would leave unrestored to the touch of time. Each little city speaks to him, tells him of those who have called it mother, of those who are gone. "They pass, but I remain to keep their memory green. I am their commemoration. That is why they owe me everything, for man is only man because he remembers. . . . I have received wounds which men thought mortal. But I live because I have hoped. Learn from me that sacred hope which saves the fatherland. Think in me so as to think beyond yourselves. Work for your children as your ancestors have worked for you. Your sons will know what jewels you in your turn have set in my robe of stone." So at last we find a page to link with the present this sheaf gathered from the portfolios of the past. Born of a vacation mood, it is an interlude in an optimistic



key. For all this time his main interest is in social satire: he is still concerned with politics and Monsieur Bergeret, and when at last he drops *Histoire contemporaine*, it is only to write the story of *Crainquebille*.

*Crainquebille* is an attack on the iniquities of the law. After the military code comes the turn of civil procedure, whose real injustice had long been evident to Anatole France. Needless to recall the Abbé Coignard's strictures against the laws, or the satire in the story of Fra Giovanni and the opinions of Professor Bergeret. Yet it is always interesting to seek the genesis of a book, and *Crainquebille* undoubtedly is an expansion of the incident of the simple Pied d'Alouette.

Arrested on suspicion, the vagabond of *Le Mannequin d'osier* leaves his prison unscathed. In *Crainquebille* the law consummates the ruin of its victim. Condemned for a pretended insult to a gendarme, the poor huckster pays the penalty of his ignorance, since his unreadiness of tongue only weakens his defense. In spite of his lawyer, in spite of the witness who exonerates him, he goes to jail; and when freed at last after serving his time, he finds himself without customers, the byword and the laughingstock of the quarter. Poor human cart-horse, denied his bread after forty years of brutalizing toil, what wonder that he turns to drink! But the irony of Fate has not yet done with Crainque-

bille. Sunken, at last, so low that he regrets his prison and his prison fare, he really cries "Down with the bulls," this time to a grave patient gendarme who rebukes, but refuses to arrest him. And the derelict of the law is forced to resume his homeless wandering.

The cold biting irony of this story recalls Maupassant. Reprinted in *Opinions sociales*, it was given a larger audience in a pamphlet published at half a franc, and finally it was turned into a play. The cheap edition came out in the *Bibliothèque socialiste* (1902), preceded by the even more brutally satiric *Conte pour commencer l'année*. In this, the typical sugary New Year's tale is turned into a bitter farce—the chimney-sweep marrying the daughter of the rich man in order to legitimize her child—a satire of conventional charity. *Opinions sociales* reprints, in fact, all of the master's views on questions social or economic, as well as some of the addresses he had already begun to deliver before gatherings of the masses.

At the same time he was polishing for a different audience a novel, *Histoire comique*—a story of the stage which reflects certain other distractions of the novelist, after fifteen years of a relationship which had become as exacting as a marriage. Still ambitious to write a story *à la Bourget*, ten years after *Le Lys rouge* he again exploited the incidents of his evenings in a picture of love and jealousy

and the life of pleasure-seeking Paris. In *Histoire comique* an actor commits suicide in the presence of his former mistress, hoping that his dying prohibition may keep her from the arms of his successor. How he succeeds in this, how his memory is transformed in a mind too nervously imaginative and not quite normal, until it becomes an accusing ghost which forbids her to love, is the story of this novel, a hard, cold, Degas-like picture, which to the realism of Maupassant adds the morbid psychology of Paul Bourget.

Anatole France thinks the story "comique," that is to say, "concerned with comedians." There is, however, nothing comic in this glimpse of the greenroom and its sordid life, disclosed as by the pitiless glare of the footlights—a world of compromise and passion, and pitiful egoism cloaked by the name of art. Throughout the novel his irony finds vent through the lips of his characters, bitter and nihilistic in the dramatic author Constantin Marc, indulgently epicurean in Doctor Trublet. This genial old skeptic, attached officially to the theater and unofficially to the pretty *comédiennes*—this Doctor Socrates, who laments "the deplorable misunderstanding which, eighteen centuries ago, put humanity on bad terms with nature," is another and older Anatole France, a tired voluptuary smiling through that Æsculapian mask which he had first worn in *Jocaste*.

Doctor Trublet's opinions are old and familiar. Like the hero of the earlier novel, he too believes that "life is murder." For him, "stupidity is the necessary condition of happiness"; morality, "the consent of all to keep what they have." So might one string a chaplet of despair from the maxims of this scientific fatalist, who, certain of human irresponsibility, certain that free will is an illusion, sees the only hope of moral improvement in a change of material conditions for men. Thus, he thinks, even that primal law of murder may pass, fall before the progress of chemistry or the useful arts. But if this result is not possible, if the world is, as it seems, irremediably bad, the old *viveur* consoles himself by the thought that he has at least enjoyed the spectacle it has given him.

The author is now a skeptic content to accept truths merely pragmatic. "I am a physician," Trublet tells us in self-justification, "I keep a drug-shop of lies. I give relief, consolation. Can one console and relieve without lying?" And he adds, "Women and doctors know how necessary and how helpful lies are to men."

Trublet has lost faith in absolute truth. "Men are not created to know, men are not created to understand." If we know more than dogs, it is but a trifle, and "our illusions increase with our knowledge." We can know nothing, attain no certainty, do nothing; and, like Bergeret, Trublet

draws a bleak comfort from the thought that the future already exists like a book unread, a reality which we only uncover as we turn the leaves. "It is possible to think that we all died long ago," observes this modern Marcus Aurelius. "Think so, and you will be at peace."

Such absolute pessimism possibly reflects the author's disappointment in the "affair." The failure of action results in the denial of action. It also recalls his youthful view of the world about him, reflects its gloom and magnifies it. "To know society as it really is," says a journalist of the story, "would make us all fall swooning with disgust and horror." But even a thorough pessimist devoid of all confidence in action may find relief in acting. During these years Anatole France is still speaking at meetings and working for reform. Work is at least a nepenthe for ennui.

He was first of all interested in the question of Church and State. The Dreyfus affair aroused great feeling against the cassock, when Frenchmen saw that the clerics had used anti-Semitism to forward their own reactionary ends. Equally prominent among monarchical revolutionists and in the nationalist movement, they had shown themselves a dangerous force in the Republic. Hence the campaign against the teaching congregations, the closing of the church schools and, ultimately, the separation of Church and State. So, not content with

his satire of episcopal appointments in the four novels, Anatole France now wrote a tract for disestablishment, *L'Eglise et la République*.

The campaign begun by the caricature-portrait of the Abbé Jérôme is now completed. With quiet, well-bred irony, he shows the unchanging claims of Rome to powers both spiritual and temporal, retraces the history of the Church in the Third Republic, lays bare the intrigues and the secret motives of ecclesiastical policy, builds up his case against the Concordat. And the conclusion of the pamphlet is a ringing appeal to Frenchmen to stop this control from without, to destroy the political force of the priests by abolishing the division of power agreed upon by a despot a century before.

Nor was his rôle as a propagandist to end here. In *Vers les temps meilleurs*, made up of all his speeches delivered from 1898 to 1906, the publisher of *L'Eglise et la République* carried out definitely the task of bringing together all his propaganda—a task only begun by the fragmentary pamphlets of the *Bibliothèque socialiste*. Half a hundred speeches, addresses, and letters were collected, a panoply of good counsel for the proletariat in its struggle for better conditions. Not to listen to the preachers of suffering, for "it is joy which is good," but to trust in reason and science which free men from the vain terrors of theology; not to support the nationalists or the contractors who urge

increased armies and armament, or the politicians who seek to involve France in imperialism, but to work for the peace universal which the proletariat of all nations is preparing—such is the perpetual refrain of these pages; optimistic pages, in fine, for, if society is now only “organized barbarism and regularized injustice, still it is thought which, despite the victories of force, conducts the world.”

*Vers les temps meilleurs* contains two fine tributes, one to the heroic spirit of Emile Zola—“il fut un moment de la conscience humaine”—another to Ernest Renan; in the latter, the magnificent discourse of Pallas Athene has often been compared to *La prière sur l'Acropole*. But always France is preaching the cause of humanity and human solidarity. And just after the Czar's visit, while Parisian crowds are still shouting “Vive la Russie,” he has the courage to unmask and denounce the capitalistic interests which contrived this political comedy in order to pay for the Japanese war out of the French stocking. In his vision, his country should lead in a sane preparation for a pacifistic Europe; for “universal peace will be realized, not because man will become better, but because a new order of things, a new science, new economic necessities will impose peace.”

A naïve illusion, but generous surely. A writer of fiction may be proud of such a dream. And notwithstanding all this polemic activity, Anatole

France was still a writer of fiction. The story of *Crainquebille* was rounded out to a volume with other sketches, realistic and contemporary and for the most part satiric. Two stories of the occult and a mystic legend are exceptions, as well as the inimitable account of the imaginary *Putois*, a fable on the growth of a belief. Next to *Putois*, the best pages in the volume entitled *Crainquebille* are the delightful *Pensées de Riquet*, a parody of La Bruyère, satirizing from a canine point of view our anthropomorphic philosophy and religion.

The book which crowns the polemic period now drawing to a close is *Sur la pierre blanche* (1905), the first part of which was written at Rome in 1903, on one of his annual trips to Italy with his lady. A pure dialogue, or rather a symposium, it contains two works of fiction, a story of the past and a dream of the future. Several Frenchmen meet in the Roman Forum, and a conversation on Roman archæology, religion, and prehistory introduces us to the first narrative, another resurrection of the life of a Roman province under the emperors. Read to the company by its author, the story of Gallio, Proconsul of Achaia under Claudius, is a bit of tapestry embroidered on the incidents described in Acts xviii: 12-17.

Gallio is depicted as a model of Roman virtue, just and temperate as Pontius Pilatus in the earlier tale. Besides this, he is a man of culture, stirred by



a noble curiosity in all the things of the intellect. With a group of friends he is discussing the future, the certain future of Rome assured by the *pax Romana*, the doubtful future of the old religion already become a symbol in a larger recognition of natural law. Gallio, who would reconcile the Stoic doctrine with the old beliefs, rises to the conception of a single God, obedient only to his own nature, the God of the Stoics. Yet in his wisdom he would show his companions the value of diversity of religion, since such diversity alone guarantees tolerance and personal freedom. And they speak of the immortality of the soul, the immortality of the gods, and wonder what god will succeed Jupiter when he follows Saturn into oblivion. At this point the Proconsul is interrupted by a band of quarreling Jews, claiming an audience. Despite the protests of his friends, Gallio yields to duty, knowing that this turbulent race, full of new Dionysiac sects whose propaganda can admit no tolerance, must be watched as a menace to peace in Corinth no less than at Rome. And all deplore the infiltration of this Asiatic poison through the Empire.

Meanwhile Gallio listens to the plaintiff, who, chief of the synagogue, accuses a certain Paul of inducing men to worship God in a manner contrary to Jewish law. But Saint Paul's defense he will not hear, declaring: "If it were a matter of

wrong or of wicked lewdness, I would bear with you, but if it be a question of words and names of your law, I shall be no judge of such matters." And he rejoins his friends, all unconscious of having dismissed the co-founder of a world-religion destined to supplant the Stoic philosophy and the pagan gods.

Gallio sought the future. The future comes to him and he knows it not. Indifferent to the deformed little Jew whom he takes for a fanatical follower of Orpheus or Adonis, the Proconsul turns the conversation back into its former channel, and leaving the Apostle to be stoned by the Jews, he sets forth his view that Hercules is destined to dethrone Jove and rule the world.<sup>1</sup>

*Sur la pierre blanche* now reverts to a discussion, first concerning Gallio, then on the growth of religions, and the evolution of morals which prepared the way alike for Stoicism and for Christianity. The cyclic theory of cosmic life, the more immediate future as seen in man's various Utopias, are touched upon; then the talk returns to the possibility of prediction. Surely the history of man should yield certain analogies, certain parallels or

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<sup>1</sup> Gallio is thus suspiciously like an attempt to repeat the success of *Le Procurateur*. Tacitus and Seneca have added coloring to the silhouette of the Bible story, developed from a hint found in a passage of Renan. For the historian of Christianity had also remarked the irony of the situation, although his inference from it was far less flattering to Gallio.

probabilities. The progress of labor from slavery and serfdom to an equality with capital may indicate the future triumph of the proletariat, as the decline of paganism suggests a like fate for Christianity. The virtual *pax Romana* of a world unified by conquest and commerce may presage a new world-truce, after colonization has brutally imposed a new solidarity.

The discussion ends. Then, at the little table of the Roman restaurant where the company is dining, another manuscript is read—a dream of the future conceived after the manner of William Morris and H. G. Wells. A young Parisian, bored and disillusioned and skeptical, awakes one morning in the year 220 of the Federation of the Peoples—2270 according to our chronology. He finds himself in a country transformed, a sort of endless suburb filled with tiny houses and their gardens. Airships, like huge birds and fishes, are gliding through the air, or pausing to fill the empty streets with workers of both sexes, indistinguishable in costume. Entering a restaurant, he learns that one must work to eat; and one of the Utopians, imagining him an estray from the Republic of Africa, leads him to a bakery where he receives his ticket, wages of six hours' toil. This friend takes him home in his *aéroplane*, and after supper the stranger learns how the new order of things had come about. War had ceased with the twentieth

century, secret diplomacy giving way to an international committee of citizens opposed to colonial greed, which had caused the last conflicts among nations. Meanwhile, a capitalistic régime had naturally evolved into collectivism; armies were supplanted by a socialistic militia and the undefended monarchies had become republics and made alliance. Then, after fifty years of experiment and economic misery, fourteen workmen had organized and distributed the conflicting powers and resources of this new society, a beehive without drones, where every worker profited alike by intensive agriculture and an intensive development of machinery and applied chemistry. With ample time to pursue the arts, contented to labor and be fed, the inhabitants of this new Utopia still confess they are not happy. But *que voulez-vous?* No one at least is miserable, and by abolishing property and cities they have been able to do away with crime and litigation.

The dream concludes with an episode showing the relation of the sexes, freed from the personal servitude of marriage and apparently from any of the Petrarchistic illusions of courtship! And the reader, laying down his manuscript, receives the placid comment of a classical quotation: "You seem to have slept upon the white stone, in the midst of the people of dreams." Dreams! Which would justify the conclusion that the whole Utopia

is not to be taken, in those days at least, as the author's real conviction. For if like Renan he accepts the possibility of Caliban, if we may attribute to him the statement of one listener, "I do not wish for socialism, but I do not fear it," he does put his dream of the new Atlantis under the decidedly ambiguous rubric, "Through the Gate of Ivory, or through the Gate of Horn!"



## 9

**S**LOWLY, but inevitably, humanity will bring to realization the dreams of its madmen."

It was thus that Jean-Jacques Brousson, the new secretary from Nîmes, playfully changed the quotation, when copying it, in a hand not to be distinguished from his master's, on the fly-leaf of a presentation copy intended for some admirer. The office of signing "autographed copies," the change made in the apothegm and the jovial approval of the author when shown the result, are not insignificant details: they paint a portrait of the perfect secretary no less than that of the novelist who employed him.

The first book of memories<sup>1</sup> published by the Francian Boswell offers a vivid picture of the life which Anatole France lived in the prosperity of his late fifties and early sixties. Here we find again the literary lion, pontificating at Madame de Caillavet's Wednesday dinners and Sunday afternoon teas, when like a well-trained pupil he would

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<sup>1</sup> Anatole France en pantoufles.

stand before the fireplace and recite anecdotes or paradoxes rehearsed before—and often to greater effect, as his schoolmistress sometimes informed him! Here too we find a more intimate portrait of the writer: we are admitted to the house in the Villa Saïd, with its stained-glass windows overlooking the Bois de Boulogne—that museum-house packed with curiosities like an antiquarian's shop but arranged with some regard to the periods represented; we meet the crusty but devoted old Swiss housekeeper Joséphine, and, like Brousson when he first came from his province to enter the service of the master, assist her in carrying up to him his morning mail and his morning chocolate. Anatole France is still in bed, with head swathed in a silk handkerchief and chest wrapped in woolen shawls; he drinks his chocolate, placed on a commode where two altar-tapers stand beside a volume of Casanova's *Memoirs*. His diligent old servant helps him don the elephant-footed trousers and the dressing-gown of the familiar portraits; she brings him a tray piled with skull-caps of every color so that he may choose one adapted to his special mood. And we see Anatole France consign to his unused bath-tub all the autographed copies of new books which admiring disciples have sent him—to await there the junk-dealer who every month pays him fifty francs and restores the tub's potential function. These details are no less instructive than

amusing: a spoiled child may remain a spoiled child to the end of his days.

Opposite the bedroom is the library, with a vast stone chimney. Around it stand glass cases filled with vases, statuettes and Tanagra figurines. Medals and rare books with armorial bindings occupy other cases; there is a huge oak table, a Louis XIV armchair and a mutilated Greek Aphrodite carved in the great period from Parian marble. This Venus, which he had smuggled out of Italy, is, he confesses, the patron saint of his domicile. And if Brousson has been a faithful Boswell, the philosopher devoted to Venus a large share of his meditations and remarks. One remembers that he was fifty-eight when the perfect secretary entered his service.

Brousson gives an inimitable account of a Sunday reception, in the library where France receives his guests, garbed in dressing-gown and slippers, and in the bedroom to which he led his little court, while Joséphine vested him, royally calm and still discoursing, with the stiff shirt and formal frock-suit he wore to Madame de Caillavet's. But he detested this panoply of street-dress; and, when one morning he chose to go book-hunting with Brousson, he donned coat and trousers over his night-shirt, only to be caught in the street by the vigilant Joséphine, who, well-trained by Madame, seized him by a button of his coat and led him back into



the house. There is a description of a typical luncheon at Madame's, and of an afternoon in the workroom of the third floor where, at a desk opposite hers, he would write or doze behind a stack of dictionaries. There are accounts of visits to the shops along the quays, anecdotes of his astuteness in detecting forged curiosities, tales of his skill in bargaining. Something of the collector and the dealer in curiosities persisted in Anatole France to the end, discernible in his manner when exhibiting a beloved treasure; a true son of his father, he would stroke the marble or old leather as if to infuse his visitor with his own gusto.

But Brousson affords us even more significant information. His volume contains many familiar anecdotes and literary judgments, and it explains in detail the novelist's method of writing. This method, which involved five or six proof-sheets, testifies to the author's success no less than to his indolence: only a great writer and a successful one can obtain such indulgence from his publishers. For this, briefly, was his *modus operandi*: sentences scribbled on odds and ends of paper, backs of letters, envelopes, margins of newspapers even, were laid in order and dispatched to the printer. When the proof-sheets came back, the master added touches of irony or malice and returned them. Then he deleted from the new proofs all superfluous relative pronouns, expunged semicolons by

making shorter sentences, and omitted the long transitions. Next he would revise his adjectives, choosing contrasting attributes so as to add piquancy. Then his shears would come into play. The new proof-sheets were cut up into their separate sentences, and these he would patiently re-arrange upon his desk, trying out all the various combinations. If a word was repeated too often, this puzzle-method would often clear up the page; and by its means he would also discover bits of rhetoric which the melody of his style had prevented him from noticing. These false beauties were ruthlessly sacrificed; all words not indispensable were expunged from the final proof.

It was by this means that he got rid of the saccharine quality he found in his first draught of certain episodes used in his *Joan of Arc*. Plainly he also practised the same use of the shears in composing *Clio* (1900), published before Brousson became his secretary. For *Clio*, the only historical volume of the polemic decade ending with *Vers les temps meilleurs*, is a masterpiece of concise and unsentimental realism.<sup>1</sup>

Taking its title from the name of the historical Muse, *Clio* offers us five pictures from the story of the past, five typical panels, not mystic, not philosophical like the earlier tales, but viewed with the

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<sup>1</sup> The stories in this collection were written between 1893 and 1897.

same vision as that which sharpened the pages of *Histoire contemporaine*. "We want to show Hector in greaves," wrote the author in *Pierre Nozière*, "and give to all the figures of legend and history their real characteristics." Thus a minute archæological exactness, such as Flaubert had attempted in *Salammbô*, is the keynote of *Clio*. The volume is dedicated to the champion of Naturalism and of Dreyfus, Emile Zola.

Not Hector, but Homer the singer of Hector, opens the panorama. A world poetic in its realism, baldly poetic as the humbler scenes of the *Odyssey*, is revived for us in *Le chanteur de Kymé*; the poor old minstrel, rude yet profoundly human, is a figure heroic as a bronze by Rodin. Living meagerly with his faithful slave, the ancient bard teaches the children of Kymé the Fair the songs he had received from his father, and his father from the Muses themselves. These sacred songs must not be changed, he tells them, hiding the fact that he has added whole cantos to the Muses' legacy, sung so often by him at the tables of the shepherd-kings.

Everything in the picture is presented objectively: the ignorance of the bard—for he knows by his dreams that the dead still live in some dim shadowy world; his resignation, which accepts without bitterness his hard lot, so different from that of the warrior; his love of beauty, his idealism and his disgust at life's brutalities. When the banquet

of one of these rough chieftains ends in a battle, and the aged poet is hurt by a flying torch, he picks up his lyre, curses the house and its occupants, and walks calmly seaward on the moonlit cliff, until the earth fails beneath his footsteps. For this objectivity, Homer's own pages furnished outlines and colors—even figures, like that little sister to Nausicaä, whose slender beauty delights the weary minstrel no less than the draught of water she gives him from her soft cupped palms.

The clear sunlight of Homeric times, uncannily vivid in a picture where no brush-stroke betrays the modern, now changes to the mistier skies which dome the forests of Cæsar's Gaul. The *Commentaries* lend color and sparkling directness to the tale of *Komm l'Atrébate*, huntsman and warrior and collector of his enemies' heads. After the defeat of his savage fellow-tribesmen by the Romans, Komm becomes an ally of these demigods of the catapult and the magic roads of stone, goes to Britain in Cæsar's service, witnesses his triumph and discomfiture there. Then, won over to rebellion by resentful Gauls, Komm plots against the Romans, and, escaping the dagger-thrust by which Titus Labienus had hoped to dispatch him, swears vengeance and joins Vercingetorix.

The rebellion fails. A fugitive now, living by the chase, Komm stumbles one day upon the stone city which has taken the place of his primitive camp.

Disguised as a peddler, he enters the town, marveling at its corruption and its luxury, for he hates the arts of Rome because he does not understand them. At last he comes to the new amphitheater, and there slays by stealth a young Roman writing poetry to his mistress in the twilight of dawn.

Marcus Aurelius comes to Gaul as quæstor. Gradually the Gauls become Romanized, shaving their beards, dressing and building as the Romans do. An exile in the forest, Komm has fallen to guerrilla warfare, then to mere indiscriminate brigandage. Hostages are legally murdered for his misdeeds; an organized expedition fails to exterminate him. Komm keeps in hiding until he has satisfied his private vengeance against the tool of Labienus; then, finding his enmity gone with his desire for revenge, he sues for peace and obtains it from the quæstor.

By a masterly choice of incident, the story of Komm becomes typical of an epoch. A world policy is crystallized in this purely objective narration. Rome conquers in the end by opposing the tenacity and order of her durable organization to the weakness of barbarian individualism, incapable of long-continued resistance, and destined to perish as surely as the war it had waged dwindled and died in highway robbery.

War again—civil war in Italy during the thirteenth century—furnishes the subject of *Farinata*

*degli Uberti*, the story of the old Florentine who, at Arbia, betrayed his fellow-citizens in the interest of his party and his private vengeance, but who justified himself, afterward, by his resistance to the Ghibellines, eager to destroy that nest of Guelphs. This arresting tableau of patriotism in an age of feuds is hardly a story, nor are the other scenes in the historical pageant of *Clio*. *Le roi boit* gives one a contrasted picture of France during the Hundred Years' War; it shows a merry Twelfth-Night feast in a monastery, interrupted by a murder ferocious as the deeds of the soldier-factions which are destroying France outside the convent walls. And finally in *La Muiron* we meet the Man of Destiny returning from Egypt, confident he will escape the English squadron and trusting in the star that points to the land of his glory and his fall.<sup>1</sup>

"History is an art, and one succeeds in it only by the imagination." Ten years before *Clio*, Anatole France had come to this conclusion and set it down in the second edition of *Sylvestre Bonnard*, in the essays and in *Le jardin d'Epicure*. But this

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<sup>1</sup> Fascinated by the problem of a temperament so different from his own, Anatole France had already discussed Napoleon in *Le Lys rouge*; now he presents objectively his earlier analysis. Napoleon is to him the perfect type of the man of action, living wholly in the present—the automaton of determinism who believes in Fate rather than in human will. "Être grand, c'est dépendre de tout." And as the author is unconsciously urged by his own deficiencies to prefer the philosophical type, he naturally adorns his hero with some touches of superstition.

denial of historical science came from a lover of history who had gained some knowledge of her methods; and all through those years, until polemics and politics pushed other interests aside, he had been working on his *Vie de Jeanne d'Arc*. Back in the eighteen-eighties he had conceived the notion of treating her as Renan had viewed the Christ, and had consigned this idea to the pages of *La Vie littéraire*. If Professor Bergeret refers learnedly to the Maid or speaks of her as "a military mascot," it is because his creator is deep in research. Possibly that research even explains the professorial mask.

Anatole France had in fact collected a bookcase of volumes on the Maid, and a stack of notes that filled a huge sack. These notes were quite as confused as they were copious, if we may believe Monsieur Brousson who, in 1902, was taken into the master's service to sort them, add the page-references and arrange the material. This work had been halted by a lost reference. So the perfect secretary ransacked the libraries of Paris until he completed the notes and located the reference; and Anatole France, who at one period was disgusted with his task and talked of abandoning it for a life of Rabelais, was so heartened by the discovery that he set to work with shears and quill. For he always worked with quill-pens, as befitted a true monk of letters.

In 1908 the fruit of their long labors was published in two large volumes. One "had to make a lot of it," that alone would insure the attention of the serious public. As it happened, the bulk of the work prevented any great success, for it was addressed to a cultured and not a scholarly audience.

"I have restored the Maid to life and to humanity," declares the Preface. And every reader of the story, so simply and beautifully told, will carry away a portrait of Joan both living and human, and far more real than any ecclesiastical or transcendental interpretation. He will also carry away a vivid picture of the age, with all its lawlessness and cruelty, its ignorance and superstition; he will realize the grievous travail by which the French nation was born. Never does the author let slip a chance to clear up a point by a parallel, to quote a legend or relate an illuminating anecdote. The hasty reader may balk at this, but the student who would learn will only praise.

Thus conceived, not as a saint or a seeress, but as a mystic and an heroic girl, limned in the style of the old chronicles—a style both simple and rich with expressive archaism—the figure of Joan has all the directness and pathos of a heroine in a great historical novel. Nothing reveals the author, unless it be occasional touches of irony provoked by ecclesiastical stupidity or guile. No pathological



discussions mar the narrative; here at least, as he says in the Preface, he accepts Joan as "a saint, a saint with all the attributes of fifteenth-century sanctity," but he does show the natural causes of her visions, and trace her resemblance to similar visionaries, like Saint Catherine of Siena and Saint Colette of Corbie. By these and other parallels he explains her and the hallucinations which made her heroic, finding beneath the directness of all her actions the automatism of the mystics. He is following the formula of his master Renan, to make her human and understandable.

Matters like these, however, are kept in the Introduction, together with a long examination of the sources. In the Introduction, too, Anatole France tells us by what pains that unity of tone was obtained; how "the difficulty of entering into the spirit of a period lies not so much in what one must know as in what one must not know." How hard for a biographer of Joan to forget that the earth is round, that the stars are suns rather than lamps, to substitute for the cosmogony of Laplace the science of Dante and Saint Thomas!—He speaks of the travels which give color to his landscapes, from the first picture of the misty river-valley of Joan's birthplace, so favorable to dreaming, to the gaunt timbered houses which beheld the final scene of the tragedy at Rouen. He tells us how lovingly he has studied everything left by

the fifteenth century, works of stone or iron or wood, figures carved and painted by men who lived nearly five hundred years ago. And he adds: "As I gazed at the old miniatures, they seemed to live before me, and I saw the noblemen in the absurd magnificence of their sham velvet, the dames and demoiselles somewhat diabolic with their horned caps and their pointed shoes; clerks seated at desks, men-at-arms riding their chargers and merchants their mules, husbandmen performing from April till March all the tasks of the rural calendar; peasant women whose broad coifs are still worn by nuns; and I drew near to these folk, who were our fellows, and who yet differed from us by a thousand shades of thought and feeling; I lived their lives; I read their hearts."

In this passage, whose sentimentality shows his earlier manner, we have also a glimpse of Anatole France; and it explains why he achieved so real a portrait in his *Life of Joan of Arc*. "To succeed in history one must have imagination," he said; and imagination is useless unless directed by sympathy. If, beguiled by his vision, he drew with too free a pen, so that his references were corrected by Andrew Lang and others, no professional scholar could have been quicker to acknowledge his mistakes and to correct them. "I have written this history with ardent, tranquil zeal," he declares in the Preface to his second edition, "I have sought Truth

strenuously, I have met her fearlessly. Even when she assumed an unexpected aspect I have not turned from her." A confession which shows that he was rather a novelist than a historian, after all.

"Maintenant je pourrais bien m'amuser un peu: perhaps now I might be allowed to have a little fun." Inevitably one thinks of this excuse of Renan's, when his life-work of research was ended and he turned his pen to dialogues on the necessity for establishing suicide booths in the streets, and wrote dramas showing that chastity is a vain thing. At the unveiling of the Tréguier statue of Renan, in 1903, Anatole France had quoted this saying of his quondam master. The *bon mot* might well have served the disciple to explain the books that were to diversify and amuse his old age.

In his late sixties he gave us four volumes of satire. Finishing his study of the Maid, he relieved the later intervals of his task by a parody, a burlesque history of France.

In *L'Ile des pingouins* Anatole France turns to caricature the legends he had loved so well in earlier years. He tells us of a certain Saint Maël, a Breton monk who many centuries ago gained great fame for his missionary zeal. Long accustomed to travel over the seas, as the early missionaries did, in a miraculous trough of stone, he is tempted by the Devil to fit out this Heaven-sent boat with sails and rudder and prow of wood. So, by his eagerness

to reach an erring flock, he puts himself into the power of the Adversary.

A frightful tempest arises, and, driven out of its course, the evil boat carries the monk away to the frozen seas of the Antarctic. At last the good man recognizes the devils blowing into his sails, exorcises them by making the sign of the cross, and, worn out and half blinded by the spray and the glittering ice, lands safely on a little isle. There he finds a colony of penguins, which he exhorts in myopic faith that they are the human inhabitants of the isle, and hearing them quack assent in their barbarian tongue he baptizes them one and all. Imagine now the consternation in Heaven and the problem suddenly presented to the Deity. What is the effect of this baptism? Is the sacrament valid through its spirit or through its form? Are the penguins now damned, although they are birds and not of the seed of Adam? Finally, the necessity of affirming the formal virtue of baptism obliges the good Lord to change the penguins to men, to give them human bodies and immortal souls. So the repentant saint performs the miracle. Then, fearing a relapse of faith in his converts, he tows the little island back to the Breton shore.

Henceforth this parody of Saint Brendan's legend becomes a transparent burlesque of French history.

By another device of the crafty Adversary, the Penguins are clothed and the female invested with

the sorcery of sex-illusion, an episode conceived and described with all the irony of the master who said that "Christianity has done most for women by declaring love sinful." With this same jovially acrid irony he describes the beginnings of the age of myth or rather of religion among the Penguins: a dragon which has laid waste the whole country, personified by a vigorous bandit, is led into captivity by the "virgin" whose coming Saint Maël predicted. And one would like to quote at length this Voltairian travesty of the legend of Saint Martha and the Tarasque, in which the slayer (and inventor!) of the dragon becomes the first king of the Penguins, and the hussy who takes the rôle of Martha becomes their patron saint.

Other inimitable chapters, like that on the Penguin Primitives, bring the parody down to modern times, and to things that Anatole France had seen and chafed under. But as he caricatures Boulanger, the Dreyfus affair and the corruption of modern politics tainted with clericalism, royalist plots and intrigues, the matter of his text is suddenly expanded beyond all proportion; half the book is given over to these chapters, which abandon the balder style of the chronicle for the circumstantial realism of a novel or a history. This may indicate that the earlier portion was finished before the *Histoire contemporaine*; in any case it proves that the author still bore the brand of the days he saw

when he was Monsieur Bergeret.—Finally, the historian turns his gaze toward the future that awaits us. “Houses could never be built high enough,” he relates; “fifteen millions of men toiled in the giant city.” Built upon capitalism and industrial oppression, a human ant hill with no vision except the pursuit of lucre, this blind, cruel, spawning monster perishes at the hands of a few idealists in a vast holocaust to the goddess Anarchy. Then follows a period of decadence and barbarism: centuries pass; wild huntsmen pursue the bear upon the site of the forgotten capital. Centuries pass, nomads and shepherds and rude farmers live there in turn. At last, the straggling villages grow into towns, the growing towns unite to form a capital. Then “houses could never be built high enough; fifteen millions of men toiled in the giant city.” Thus ends *L’Ile des pingouins*, breaking off abruptly its endless cycle of despair.

Here is a prophecy not to be reconciled with the optimism of *Sur la pierre blanche*. Critics have called *L’Ile des pingouins* the burial of an illusion, finding the author in the idealistic astronomer Bidault-Coquille, who, by the side of Colomban the sociologist (Zola), leaves his observatory-tower to fight for Pyrot (Dreyfus), unjustly accused of selling eighty thousand bundles of hay to a hostile empire. Bidault does not find among the Pyrotins that pure love of truth which had spurred him to

action, and so he goes back disheartened to his tower, glad to escape from the crowd again. "You imagined," he says to himself, "that at one stroke you could establish justice in your country and in the universe. You were a brave man, an honest idealist, but lacking in the philosophy of experience. . . . And now that you have lost your illusions, now that you know that it is hard to redress wrongs and that the task is never finished, you return to your asteroids. You are right, but have no pride in your returning, Bidault-Coquille!"

"Alas, one's power to love declines and dies away in old age, like all the other energies of man," wrote Anatole France in 1881. Did his irony lose its indulgence, because all irony corrodes its vessel in the end? At any rate this purely satiric vein goes on; all the foibles of human existence are held up to ridicule in *Les sept femmes de la Barbe-bleue*. Based on "authentic documents," the story is merely a mock-scientific investigation of the legend, rehabilitating the worthy gentleman whose matrimonial experiments ended fatally—through the vices of his wives! But the other tales of the volume are far more pungent than this satire of women, which only proves that Anatole France is far from the days when he retold legends not as a satirist but as an artist.

Take for instance the next story, *Le miracle du grand Saint-Nicolas*. The parody of scientific

method continues in the care with which the hero of the nursery rhyme is distinguished from the Lycian bishop, but the satire cuts more deeply. According to popular legend, Saint Nicholas resuscitated from the innkeeper's pork barrel three tender children which mine host had killed and salted down seven years before. Anatole France develops the theme and, like Voltaire in one of his *Tales*, shows the results of this intervention. Adopted by the bishop, all three boys live and grow up, but one robs him and despoils his church, another debauches his beloved niece, while the third, taking orders in spite of his advice, sows in his bishopric a frightful heresy, the scandal of which drives the good prelate out of his palace, excommunicate, to atone for it in the solitude of the hills. There he meets another penitent, converted by the miracle—the innkeeper. The inscrutable ways of Providence are at last explained!

Then there is the story of Sleeping Beauty, or rather of the dissolute minister of the royal court who, after his secular slumber as before, still denies the existence of fairies. This is a satire of cheap skepticism, the skepticism of the French middle classes. But better than this piece of eighteenth-century badinage, whose humor displays a Rabelaisian indelicacy of taste, is the tale which fills the last half of the book, *La Chemise*.

Transplanted to a modern setting, this is simply



the old story of the royal *Malade imaginaire* who was told to put on the shirt of a perfectly happy man. The King, who seems to be drawn after the pleasure-seeking Leopold II of Belgium, has no evident reason for melancholia. His well-managed constitutional government gives him little trouble, for, having found his actions ineffective or productive of the wrong effects, he has learned to leave it entirely to his ministers. He is free to follow his own pleasures, as he has always done. But he is bored, bored with everything, ridden by melancholy as by the Old Man of the Sea. He loses sleep and appetite, suffers vague pains, which increase in spite of every treatment. Finally he seeks aid from a new physician, a believer in natural remedies, who decides that the necessary tonic is a shirt imbued with an optimist's excess of joy.

Two courtiers take up the quest of the shirt, or rather the quest of the happy man. But the noble lord who is first approached secretly laments that he is not yet a marquis, the popular orator regrets that he is not an aristocrat. An heroic duke, the savior of his country, is senile and the victim of his servants; one millionaire is a dyspeptic and another lives in fear of being robbed. The connoisseur, in his palace filled with treasures, is vexed by a chimney-stack which spoils his view; the ladies' favorite is mated to an old hag. One fears death, being a Jansenist, another because he is an Epi-

curean. The famous musician is secretly jealous of the popular song-writer. One happy man they do find, but he has just taken the resolution to die. Meanwhile the King is sinking fast; in desperation, a huge commission now examines hundreds of men a day.

Women are excluded, for the prescription must be followed literally. Besides, as one of the courtiers observes, "in our class they do not bring up their children, do not direct their households, know nothing, do nothing, and kill themselves with fatigue; they consume themselves in shining; theirs is only a candle's life." Finally, after a search in the remotest parts of the kingdom has yielded but one hopeful case, a charitable priest, and he has confessed the secret anguish of his loss of faith, they discover a poor half-witted vagabond, careless and merry as the day is long. Yes, he is happy—he admits the condition although he does not know the word; but when they offer him a fortune for his shirt, he hasn't any!

This is the very whip-lash of Voltaire. Wielded gracefully but lightly by Jérôme Coignard, that flail had gained force under the strokes of Bergeret, until the professor attained something of the vigor shown in *Candide*—something of the terrible power which always lifted from its victim's back a bleeding strip of skin. But Voltaire's influence, in all the books of satire beginning with *L'Ile des*

*pingouins*, is strengthened by a coarser and more violent humor. Like Professor Bergeret at times and like Doctor Trublet, Anatole France is become a great lover of Rabelais and his kind, and opposite the bookcase filled with chronicles of Joan of Arc he had collected a purgative "antidote" to this "poison," as he called it—a bookcase devoted to Rabelais and his racy fellows.

"O Milesian tale-writers, O subtle Petronius, O my Noël du Fail!"—exclaims the Professor, seeking oblivion from his tribulations on the shelf where stand his *Pantagruel*, his *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles* and his other facetious books bound in leaves of missals such as the novelist selected to vest his own copies of these scurrilous masters;—"O precursors of Jean de la Fontaine! What teacher of men was wiser and kinder than you, so commonly called scallywags! O my benefactors! You have taught me the true science of life, a benevolent contempt for men."

Such a devotion could not fail to bear its fruit in Anatole France, when age and ennui had broken down the bounds of his earlier classicism. Rabelais inspired Bergeret's fable, *Les Trublions*, and the fabliau *Jean Coq et Jean Mouton*. His influence is patent in *L'Ile des pingouins* with its apologues, its farcical humor and its long comic enumerations. These enumerations so dear to monastic wit become one of the disciple's favorite tricks of style in

the volume containing *La Chemise*. Rabelais is taken as model in a whole collection of amusing but trivial tales, *Les Contes de Jacques Tournebroke* (1908), filled with gross humor and written in sixteenth-century French, but not otherwise remarkable. Rabelaisian touches are frequent in *La Révolte des anges*, a little later; and a plot taken from *Pantagruel* was used in the sparkling *Comédie de celui qui épousa une femme muette* (1912), which sets forth the story of a book-lover so tortured by his wife when she recovers her power of speech, that he compels the physician who had cured her to make him deaf.

There is hardly a page of Anatole France which is not autobiographical. In his married life years before, he would gladly have welcomed deafness when he "could not choose but hear" the tirades from which Bergeret suffered. Now, after a liaison of twenty years, his situation was identical with that of the timid professor. According to Monsieur Brousson, his Muse was become more than a martinet who exacted from him his daily stint of "copy." She supervised his private life through his servant Joséphine, she watched his feminine friendships acknowledged or unacknowledged, she curbed his passion for the greenroom and its pretty show-girls, and hence vetoed his project of writing a play for the famous actress Réjane; she was jealous, on their summer journeys together, of all women,

for were they not received everywhere as Monsieur and Madame Anatole France?

At Paris, after a sleepless night filled with suspicions, she would put on a peignoir and fur coat and descend in a cab upon the house in the Villa Saïd; she would arouse Joséphine at dawn and invade the master's bedroom to assure herself that he was sleeping the sleep of a hermit, as befitted a loyal squire and a quondam chronicler of the saints and the saintly Maid. At least Brousson reports one such stormy interview, prolonged into the morning, when his master had to listen to a host of epithets, ending in the most insulting of all, *fil de bouquiniste*.<sup>1</sup>

*Antiquus amor carcer est*: a love of long standing is a dungeon, observes some philosophic freedman depicted by the divine Petronius. A long liaison may prove more galling than any legal shackle. If one is bound by the latter, Anatole France is reported to have said, one merely leaves the matter to an attorney; where there is no such fetter one is fatally enchained. So, when early in 1909 Anatole France was invited to give a course of lectures in the Argentine, Uruguay and Brazil, he accepted despite all the protests of Madame.

Undeterred, Madame proposed to go with him. Since he refused to take anyone but his secretary,

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<sup>1</sup> Son of a second-hand book dealer.

she insisted on sending her valet François, to care for him and to watch over him. At the end of April, 1909, Anatole France, Brousson and François embarked for Buenos Aires, on the same boat with a company of actors from the Comédie Française. Like the sage disciple of Rabelais, they too were bearing the gifts of the Muses to the inhabitants of the New World. Madame, who at the last moment presented to him a notebook in which to write his impressions so as to "bring back a volume," was left weeping on the quay.

When at last a letter came from the Argentine and she opened it, radiant, to read to a circle of friends, it proved to be signed, not by France, but by François. She suffered deeply, and she had to hide her suffering. Her relations with the novelist had resulted in the "desertion" of Monsieur and the disapproval of her son, the dramatist, who disliked France; she was left to bear her situation alone. Then, one day, she received an anonymous letter from South America, announcing that France was to be married to an actress of the troupe which had accompanied him to Buenos Aires. Soon after came an article from a newspaper recording the presence of "Monsieur and Madame France" at an official reception.

The absentee had, in fact, become infatuated on the steamship during the long journey southward, and so madly that he took the lady with him to the

house where he was entertained. It was no wonder, considering the fact that she had no legal status, that his lectures at Buenos Aires on Rabelais were attended only by men; the priests had warned the ladies in regard to the lecturer no less than the subject—both were taboo. Meanwhile the infatuation continued, and the secretary's frank advice to his master was the cause of his being left behind when France took the steamer to continue his speeches—on other subjects than Rabelais, however—at Montevideo and Rio de Janeiro.

In both cities the actress shared his triumphs. But she did not succeed in marrying the novelist; when she descended with her trunks at his house in Paris, Joséphine, properly admonished, told her that he was "en bateau." Actually he was in southern France with Madame de Caillavet, who was still suffering from the shock to her love and her pride. There can be no reconciliation between lovers when one has made the other ridiculous in the eyes of the world, and the renegade's failure to remark her real physical illness made matters even worse. "Everything is spoiled," she wrote to a friend, "irremediably spoiled."

When they returned to Capian in the autumn of 1909, she was very ill from a neglected cold; her lungs were affected and her physician kept her detained at Capian till January. She returned to

Paris only to die there, after giving to her daughter-in-law the letters Anatole France had written her. To this beloved daughter she had confessed that she did not care to live, that she had no courage to live the life which awaited her.





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NOR for some months afterward did Anatole France care to live. His December passion, his deeper bond to her who gave him will power, all had fallen about his head like a house of cards. It was a bewildered old man who came late to the funeral in the aristocratic church at Paris, fell into the arms of "Monsieur," recalled by death from his "desertion," and was given the husband's place beside the bier. It was an old man conscious of the world's opinion who sat there timidly, embarrassed by his top hat, donning spectacles to view the frescoes of the roof and then quickly removing them. But at the end of the service he fulfilled his duties like a prelate, describing a huge sign of the cross upon the coffin of his Muse.

His mode of existence had to be reorganized now. Madame de Caillavet had "managed" him despite his fear of responsibilities; by her force of character and by her clever flatteries she had given him the resource of labor and its rewards. Who could continue her inestimable services? For despite all his admirers he had few intimates. Possibly she

had aided in that result. But it was also due to his evasive fear of binding himself; she once said to him: "Friends? you have no friends, you have only habits."

And she was right. Compared to ideas, people had for this skeptic only an external reality—the thin reality of every figure in his novels except himself. All his life he had found more amusement in ideas. He loved to play with them—to feel his ego playing masterfully with them, on paper or before an audience. This spiritual compensation a single listener could offer, and if that listener were sympathetic he would hear the master talk very intimately. Far too intimately, at times! The mass of reported conversations published since the death of Anatole France shows his need—and the stimulus he got—from his one-sided contact with that humanity he despised but could not do without. Like Goethe whom he ranked highest among the moderns, he knew the heights were lonely. But it is not related that Goethe frequented old bookstores to talk before a group chiefly composed of strangers, as France frequented Tridon's shop at Tours.

It was one of his old admirers at the house in the Villa Saïd who came to him then, when he was still suffering from his loss. She was a friend of Rodin's, a Hungarian lady who wrote under the pen name of Sandor Kemerli. Madame Georges Bölöni had

long been an ecstatic worshiper of Anatole France; she had sat at his feet—literally!—in a devotion only curbed by the jealous care of his reigning Muse. So the death of Madame and the illness of her aged demigod brought this lady straightway to Paris, to nurse him back to health and hope by her devotion and her recipes.

Thus the novelist was enabled to resume his cherished habits. That spring he took Madame Bölöni, her husband, and his physician, Doctor Couchoud, on his long-accustomed trip to the land of Mignon's regrets. The doctor advised it; under the lovely sky of Italy he would recover his strength, and in its museums and art galleries he would find distraction from his gloom. Madame Bölöni would serve as his secretary: he could dictate to her the novel which he had begun in 1909, a tale of the French Revolution. And in writing this story he plainly gained a certain relief, since in it he confessed himself with far more tenderness than he put into *Histoire comique*.

*Les Dieux ont soif* is hardly an historical novel. It is a picture of the everyday life of 1793, a novel in which people eat and drink and sleep, indifferent, as the mass of men in 1914, to the tremendous drama of contemporary history. Weary of the dream of fraternity which they have not found, their interest turns solely to pleasure parties, to songs and plays and romances; the scarcity of food

is more to them than the Republic; each great event dwindles as it enters their dwarfish minds and becomes as insignificant as they. In the background rages the Revolution: we hear vaguely of military disasters, of foreign plots; we get a passing glimpse of Marat and of Robespierre, of the goddess Guillotine, of the "woman Antoinette" on her way to the block. But never absent from the picture is the Revolutionary Tribunal, constantly growing in power, until it becomes a *bête mystique*, like the mine in *Germinal*. "The prisons were full, the public accuser worked eighteen hours a day. To the defeats of the armies, to the revolts of the provinces, to the conspiracies, the plots and the betrayals, the Convention opposed the Reign of Terror. The gods were athirst."

The hero of the story is the young painter Gamelin, austere and rigid as the works of his master David. Made a member of the Revolutionary Tribunal through the offices of an adventuress, he is transformed by his conception of duty and patriotism into a judicial machine, inhuman and unfeeling as the knife. In the end he becomes a monster, sacrificing friend and foe alike, inflexible even to the claims of a mother and sister for mercy. Against this type, so antipodal to the author's nature, is set the figure of the ruined tax-farmer Brotteaux, a "joyous atheist," contented even in the attic where he makes jumping-jacks to earn his

bread, enjoying life still as a spectacle and reading his pocket Lucretius as he waits his turn in the bread-line. Smiling, suave, immaculate in his threadbare coat, old Brotteaux is more than a figure from the Ancien Régime; he represents, according to Mademoiselle Laprévotte, what Anatole France imagined he would become in an age of popular insurrection. This is why he exhibits the philosophic nihilism of Professor Bergeret and of Doctor Trublet; it is why he shares their skeptical views of revolutions. "When you wish to make men good and wise, free, temperate and generous, you are of necessity led to the desire to kill them all. Robespierre believed in virtue, he produced the Reign of Terror: Marat believed in justice, he demanded two hundred thousand heads."

"Look where you will, Nature shows us but two spectacles, Love and Death." By the events of the year before, Life had just reminded Anatole France of this dictum written in earlier days. At any rate it might well serve as epigraph for *Les Dieux ont soif*, so skillfully is the tragic carnival relieved by the idyl of love. Even the bloodthirsty Gamelin loves, and repeats with all the world the lyrical phrases of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Others love with the pagan directness of true Voltairians, but everyone puts a feverish ardor into his passion, knowing how soon it may be quenched in the red stream flowing down into the Seine. Otherwise the

Revolution does not exist for them, ironic puppets of the primal force of life. Eros is king, joining lovers' hands through prison bars, holding back on the witness-stand words that might have saved; sending these aristocrats with a kiss on their lips down the dusty road to death, brave and silent, indifferent as the pagan Horace to their impending doom. For well they know—and well the author approaching seventy knows—that

Omnes eodem cogimur: omnium  
Versatur urna: serius ocius  
Sors exitura, et nos in æternum  
Exilium impositura cymbæ.

Thus the novel sets forth the grace of a fallen aristocracy, of a society ruled by the pursuit of pleasure. It is a pagan protest against that pure idealism which makes men monsters like Gamelin. That epicurean age which had seen a millennium fail was exactly the period to fascinate one like Anatole France; in 1793 the vortex of events shortened human life to a span hardly longer than the lives of flowers. So he loves this age for its tragic brevity; the fact is evident in the perfection of his masterpiece, long caressed by the labors of the file. If the plot is still loose, if the novel does not end at its real climax, we must remember that Madame de Caillavet was no longer there. In general, its construction is marvelous in its contexture

of somber realism and lyric idyl. Exquisite the modulation of the rhythm, the "dying fall" of the chapter endings; wonderful the art which turns the commonest incident into a symbol: the jumping-jacks lacking a soul, "parce que je suis un Dieu bon," the carriage filled with pretty women and roses, the carnations blooming in Elodie's window—a scarlet thread running through the story, until the last blossom falls at the feet of the lover in the tumbril, on his way to the guillotine.

*Les Dieux ont soif* appeared in 1912; the proofs were corrected during a trip to northern Africa made that summer. Two years after this swan song of his lyrical eroticism, Anatole France vented the Rabelaisian mood better suited to his age in another novel, in which he dealt religion and theology his last great blow.

*La Révolte des anges* is the story of a plot against heaven, plainly inspired by Milton's epic. It describes a conspiracy against the Jahveh of the Old Testament and the Talmud, whom Anatole France, like Ernest Renan, is pleased to conceive as a cruel despotic demiurge, opposed to the enlightenment which he personifies in his rival Lucifer. This dualistic theory of the world had interested him since he wrote *Thaïs*; we need not recall his Baudelairian idealization of the Adversary in *L'humaine tragédie*. Taking contemporary Paris as a setting, he narrates the plot suggested to one of earth's fallen

angels by the many volumes of a library filled with theology, science and philosophy. The chief conspirators are cherubim, seraphim and archangels, drawn to earth by motives often far from angelic, and living there as Russian nihilists, musicians and Bohemians of every sort. Their historian makes them subject to very human frailties—the erotic frailties of Bergeret's favorite tales—and to their fatalistic vision of all things to come he opposes the moral prejudices of men, so that the young Frenchman involved in their circle finally deems it his duty to try and convert his own guardian angel. We learn the secular rôle of these comrades of Lucifer in the history of man, who owes to them his progress, his learning and his civilization; the chapters in which the flute-player Nectaire (Pan) relates in dreamy recollection the long course of divine and human history are perhaps the best in the book. Here we are told that Lucifer's attack upon Heaven had failed only because of the thunderbolts launched against him; but with that secret of the demiurge divulged by the Quaker, Benjamin Franklin, Jahveh's superiority is no longer to be feared. Therefore the conspirators prepare a great store of bombs, organize their forces and seek their chief to implore his leadership. But Lucifer has a dream, in which he does conquer Heaven and drive his enemy down to earth, only to realize that nothing is accomplished by his valor. For, when recog-



nized by Rome, he simply grows cruel as the power he had hated, while opposition now makes his enemy tolerant and just. So, realizing that victory has merely inverted their rôles, that wars only engender wars, he refuses the proffered generalship, preferring the lowly scene of his past labors to Heaven, and the greater victory over ignorance and fear to any conquest of the skies.

The meaning of the story, full of repeated epigrams and vaguely recalling *La Rôtisserie* without its measure of taste and moderation, is therefore the uselessness of all war. Such was the message this modern Lucian once more gave to his country and to the world in February, 1914. Six months later the Republic and Europe were plunged into the greatest war the world had ever known.

Anatole France answered the call of Mars like a philosopher. In the first wild hour of hatred, when the whole nation clamored for vengeance upon the invaders, he wrote a letter to the newspapers recalling his fellow citizens to moderation: "We shall not defile our victory by any crime. . . . We shall proclaim that the French nation admits to its friendship the vanquished enemy." Then, when criticism and obloquy overwhelmed him in a hailstorm of some five hundred insulting letters, the old man of seventy offered his sword. Too old

to pass the physical examination in October, he was allowed to assist in propaganda work, and his next book, written and sold for the profit of the wounded, was a glorification of the Republic's defenders fighting or fallen, *Sur la voie glorieuse* (1915).

The philosopher then responded like a man, with the violence of all the intellectuals who found in speech their only mode of fighting. "We must destroy from top to bottom the military power of Germany, take from that barbarous people all possibility of pursuing their dream of a world empire. . . . It is criminal to make appeals to peace, to desire peace until the forces of oppression are destroyed." One letter even preaches the duties of all neutrals. He tells the soldiers: "What you are defending is your native land. . . . What you are defending is your church-belfry, your roofs of brick or slate, the tombs of your fathers and the cradles of your children. What you are defending is our proud cities, rearing along the river-banks the monuments of generations. . . . What you are defending is our moral patrimony, our *mores*, our customs, our laws, our habits, our beliefs, our traditions; 'tis the work of our sculptors, our architects, our artists . . . 'tis the song of our musicians; it is the mother-tongue. . . . What you are defending is the French genius. . . . What you are defending is not merely France, but Europe."

This patriotism was not destined to last long. The arch-skeptic was too far from the bombs and shells then falling upon Paris to remain belligerent in his cold-blooded seventies. For at the beginning of the war he had left Versailles, where he had installed himself so as to rebuild his town house, grown too small for its collections, and sought a new home removed from danger in the heart of Touraine. In the country near Tours he had discovered a charming old house, La Béchellerie; he purchased it and there he lived for the duration of the war, with Mademoiselle Laprévotte, Madame de Caillavet's former maid, who after the death of Joséphine had become his housekeeper.

At La Béchellerie his natural irony reasserted itself. "General Joffre learned of the Marne victory from the columns of *Le Petit Parisien*," he remarked in 1915 to one of his numerous Sunday visitors. Discussing the war with liberal and socialist friends, he soon decided that it was a war of business interests, for which the proletariat were paying with their lives. And the thought of the shambles he could see behind the bulletins sickened him: it were better to end it at once. He did not speak out; but his first patriotic books he excused by saying that he had shouted like his janitress.

It was hardly surprising that the holder of such views should not rejoice at the entrance of the

United States into the conflict. They would certainly "prolong the war," these new allies, whom he thought inspired by interests purely commercial. And at La Béchellerie he amused himself and his French guests, welcoming with ironical courtesy the many young men in khaki who "came to see him like the curiosities of Tours." Two Americans, however, he admitted into his intimacy, and when the tide of battle changed, he ascribed it to the reinforcements from the United States. So at least we are told in the volume recording many Sundays at La Béchellerie, by Monsieur Legoff, a French soldier serving his country at Tours.<sup>1</sup>

*Anatole France à la Béchellerie* is useful as a catalogue of the visitors there. Radicals of every sort, from the great English socialist expelled from France by Clemenceau to the very different Russian agitator, Rappoport, were welcomed as brothers by the master. Several pages describe his acid reaction to President Wilson and to the Treaty of 1919, whose articles he considered the dragons' teeth of future wars. We read of the enthusiasm

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<sup>1</sup> See *Anatole France à la Béchellerie*. One need not quote the discourtesy attributed to the son of one of our presidents—either him who gave his life for France or his brother—to discredit this volume. An author who feared that he was being watched and whose mail was opened would hardly have said: "To think that the two most intelligent nations of the globe, France and Germany, are going to continue to kill off the best of their sons for the profit of such savages." The date of the book, 1924, is very significant!

with which Anatole France learned of the Russian Bolshevik Revolution, to the principles of which he, after the war was ended, affirmed his adherence in a public letter. But not long before he died he was completely disillusioned and lost all faith in Lenin and the Soviets: he became disgusted with all revolution. The same disgust which had made *Les Dieux ont soif* a pamphlet against any political idealism resorting to force, his tongue now voiced again, with all the acrid conservatism of Jérôme Coignard.

So in his last years Anatole France completed the circle of his beliefs, returning to the pessimism of Taine which he had first put, undiluted, into *Jocaste* in 1879. He was by nature and training a conservative. Why then did he turn socialist and bolshevist? Was it because an egotist with any imagination hates suffering even in others? Was it because, in approaching that life from which books and the study of the past had long estranged him, he really hoped for better things of men, and that a cynicism derived from books and underlaid with hope was not yet replaced by a cynicism forged from actualities? Was it because the "silent orgies of meditation" disintegrated his personality—if consistency is necessary to a personality? Or did pure timidity and an attempt to compensate for it make him a destroyer who enjoyed his rôle of destruction? In his old age he said, "I have spent

my life twisting dynamite into curl papers." Alas, perhaps no writer is free from some taint of intellectual exhibitionism—a vice not always expiated, as with this "reformer," by obsequies in which one's bier becomes a rallying-point for a nation's malcontents.

In 1919 Anatole France suffered the loss of his daughter Clothilde—the Suzanne we know in *Le Livre de mon ami*. Clothilde was the divorced wife of Captain Mollin, and had married Renan's grandson Michel Psichari, who was killed in the war. This was a death embittered by estrangement: her father regretted that he could not have forgiven her. There was a grandson, Lucien Psichari, who was invited to live at La Béchellerie, and when the villa had been enlarged the boy came to cheer his grandfather's last years.

These were spent here in the country; only occasionally did he visit his Paris home, which was rebuilt and again adorned with the bulk of his treasures. The climate of Touraine was more clement, and the climate was a matter of consideration not only for him but for Mademoiselle Laprévotte, who had undergone a serious operation and was still ailing. Her health was a constant concern to him. For her sake he had spent one winter of the war on the Riviera, at Antibes. For her diversion he bought detective stories by the hundred, and would read them aloud. Finally,

as he was solicitous for her future welfare and feared a possible lawsuit from his first wife after his demise, he married this devoted companion, by a civil ceremony, in the autumn of 1920. Although many years younger, she did not long survive him.

His last years brought many honors to Anatole France. He gave us two more volumes of memories: *Le Petit Pierre*, whose serial publication had been interrupted by the opening of hostilities, aroused great enthusiasm when it appeared in 1918; and *La Vie en fleur*,<sup>1</sup> its companion volume on his adolescence, was welcomed despite its obvious inferiority. Although he had fewer literary followers, as might have been expected in a transformed epoch tired of skepticism, his reputation was certainly increasing; he was the last of the classics and the acknowledged Dean of French Letters. London gave him a veritable triumph at the dinner organized in his honor when he was seventy-five; two years later he was invited to Sweden to receive the Nobel Prize, and his eightieth birthday in April, 1924, was celebrated by a huge Jubilee at Paris.

But the old man did not long survive this festivity crowning his half century of published work. All the following summer he was ill. He was ill of

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<sup>1</sup> Published in 1922. His last book was a revision of his first, *Alfred de Vigny* (1924).

old age. From his early sixties the *soi-disant* voluptuary, affected with a hepatic weakness, had taken the greatest care of himself, drinking milk and mineral water, abjuring tobacco and wine too, except upon festal occasions. Thus he had lived longer than any of his family, for two generations. As autumn approached he took to his bed, ready for death. "Couldn't you give me a few little maladies?" he asked his physician. "It is time it were finished, high time." And he passed away without suffering, on the twelfth of October, 1924, calling several times during the last days for his mother. In those hours of limbo he found her and became once more Petit Pierre.

During his last months he was planning to adorn La Béchellerie with a French garden. Above the landscape of rolling hills, gleaming white statues were to lead the visitor to a temple—a Temple of Love in the classic style of the eighteenth century. Thus to the last days of his life he pursued his cult of Beauty. For in Beauty alone he found that escape from self which he was always seeking.

Yet "the last years of Anatole France were especially melancholy." The testimony of Monsieur Ségur, who made him the text of *Les Mélancolies de l'intelligence*, is quite convincing on this point, for it is based on a relationship of many years. Monsieur Ségur found him, one spring morning in 1922, alone among the treasures of his Paris house



—treasures which all recalled a happier day; he listened to his resentful tirade against the spring-time, endlessly and stupidly renewing the mold of life upon the surface of the world.<sup>1</sup> Anatole France at seventy-eight found even the Paris he had loved distasteful. "Mon Dieu, que c'est laid!" he murmured walking in the Place de la Carrousel. For him the capital was too full of ghosts; the very book-boxes along the river renewed his gloom, and he avoided their vicinity when night began to fall. Then, as when he wrote *Le Livre de mon ami* at the age of forty, he knew that all fame ends in that charnel house of old books spread out in their coffin-boxes along the Seine.

Approaching eighty, he found life "frightful," and the mere idea of living his own career over again, as Renan said he would gladly do, made him shudder. "I have not felt happy a single hour," he asserted, "not a single moment, at least since my childhood. One must really forget oneself, lose the notion that one is alive, in order to be happy. That boon was never accorded me. In order to be happy one must be ignorant of everything except the present moment. If one lacks that power, one must at least communicate with men and lose oneself among them, or forget oneself in passion. Those are the conditions of happiness. I have never

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<sup>1</sup> Renan, who originated that metaphor, enjoyed a truly epicurean old age among his little family.

known anything like them in my life. . . . I have never succeeded, except superficially, in communicating with my fellow-men. As for passion, I have not felt its madness, except during my childhood in my adoration for my mother.

"I have felt desires, certainly, great affections; but I am ignorant of those delirious raptures which act on men like drunkenness or opium. . . . The joys of the senses? I possess in fact all sorts of weaknesses. I am without strength and without defense when confronted by those wretched pleasures which give a mixture of oblivion and humiliation, of titillation and disgust. . . . The joys of thought? But it is thought which gives us the measure of other men's empty and ugly nullity, and of one's own wretchedness, frightful and vertiginous. . . . The thought that we do not know where we come from or where we are going? . . . The thought that we are living on a little drop of the great river of the Milky Way . . . and that in a moment we shall disappear, and soon after all the race of men? . . . What thought? That man continues to live by struggling, cannot see beyond himself, hates himself and thinks his hatred is love, lives in ignorance and fear, a simpleton in his youth and impotent in his old age . . . predisposed to death from birth, and dying in his hopes and illusions before he dies in the flesh? What

thought? The thought of humanity's frightful past darkened by slavery and dungeons? . . . or rather the thought of the future, that future which is dawning, without an ideal, bemired in frightful utilitarianism, that future which will again begin the cycle of past barbarism, and when, deprived of even the false mirage of the Ideal, wearing the grotesque spectacles which men call science and which merely magnify the sight of our evils, we shall enter upon another Middle Ages? And Europe will perish, swollen with pride and putrid with lucre. . . .

"No! It is the power to deceive oneself that gives value to existence."

Goethe discovered a final serenity in the ideal of the second part of *Faust*—labor for the good of humanity. This disciple of his found in beauty alone a sterile escape from self and from the bleaker universe in which he was born, the world of Darwin and Taine. The religion of literature—the school of Art for Art's sake—went bankrupt for his intelligence, too Parisian and too ironic to attain, like Flaubert and Leconte de Lisle, a full salvation through rhetoric.

*Væ solis!* There is more than a religious import in the truth that only he who shall lose his life shall find it. The old age of great men shows that it is a rather fundamental fact of human psychol-

ogy. The life of this skeptic and egotist is ended, and those epigrams so carefully barbed fall rather pathetically against the tombstone inscribed ANATOLE FRANCE. After all, the one perfect flower of his irony was his career.



## II II

WE DO not remain one moment the same, and yet we never become different from what we are," said Anatole France at thirty. But what was the stable element in this restless soul? Was it the poet or the Naturalistic novelist, the dilettante or the patient historian, the mystic or the rabid anticlerical, the amiable skeptic or the bitter polemic, the cynical satirist or the reformer, the scoffer at men or the humanitarian and builder of a new Utopia? What is constant in this kaleidoscope of phases or moods?

Halt your kaleidoscope at any figure, and take it apart. Some of the colors are covered up by others, but underneath lie all the elements of every pattern. Take Anatole France in any of his phases, and one finds, balanced or conflicting or dominated one by the other, his two basic elements: an imagination essentially romantic and a Voltairian keenness of analysis. And under all their changes of pattern plays the same motive force, the same instrument, the *sensibilité nerveuse* which he early noted in Racine: in other words, the artist's tem-

perament, vibrant and sensuous, richly responsive but timorous and too delicately poised—a nature which, after its first contact with life, is bound to turn away from its ugliness to that softer reflection of reality given by literature and art.

“There are times when everything surprises me, times when the simplest things give me the thrill of a mystery,” he wrote at forty. This is the faculty which makes the poet, the mystic, the curious and eager dilettante. “Imagination turns into an artist a man whose feeling is stirred, and a brave man into a hero.” This is the faculty which makes the idealist and the dreamer of reform.

Fond of the marvelous and the exotic, enamored of the past, subjective and sentimental beneath all his irony, finding in memory “une Muse divine,” this imagination is undeniably romantic. But against that influence works the acid of an intellect analytic as Voltaire’s, solving or dissolving all; and if its rational activity, which gives us the scholar, the philosopher, and the satirist, does not invariably end in cynicism, one may be reasonably sure of that result in a temperament self-betrayed by its visions and wounded through its abnormal sensitiveness. Before that final term, his intellect finds pause on Montaigne’s pillow of doubt and, happily mingled with imagination, finds flower for over a decade in its finest pages.

Who, could we choose, would not live the golden

forties with Anatole France? In those cloister days, protected like his long adolescence, even the timid "nervous sensibility" of the artist combines happily with his mental faculties, urging fancy and intellect alike to explore. Rooted in an ardently sensitive nature, "that high curiosity, which," as he tells us, "was to cause the confusion and the joy of his life, devoting him to the quest of that which one never finds," now leads the poet and the scholar to a past infinitely more attractive than the present. An egotist, an intellectual romanticist, loving the past less for truth's sake than for the escape it offers to his imagination, where it reflects itself as richly as a woman's beauty in a Renaissance mirror, so too he loves the ideas of the past, the ideas of the present, the marvels of science, the Utopias of the reformers, the poetry in all of man's pageant of philosophy, whereof he believes not a single word. We may rightly blame the selfishness of this attitude, but even an idle curiosity may produce for us the gift of beauty. So with this intellectual hedonist: in his richly furnished mind each new impression echoes and re-echoes, until somewhere down the galleries of memory it strikes to music a forgotten harp or violin. For Anatole France lives in his memory as he lives in art and reality.

Yes, reality. Even this skeptical monk of letters cannot completely shut out the real world, the

world of feeling and experience. "Like others, skeptics too are subjected to all the illusions of the universal mirage: they too are the playthings of appearances; sometimes vain forms cause them to suffer cruelly. Useless for us to see the nothingness of life; a flower will sometimes suffice to fill it to overflowing."

There, surely, the conflict of his temperament stands revealed. Impossible for him to reconcile his intellect, his pessimism, with the sensuously imaginative love of beauty which draws him—with that passion which fires his artist's blood before life's tragic moments of beauty—brief foam-flowers lapsing into waves of ugliness or a flood-tide of indifference or despair. Impossible to reconcile this conflict, which makes Bergeret, beset by provincial vulgarity, "dream of a villa with a white loggia set above a lake of blue, where, with his friends, he might converse in the perfume of the myrtles, at the hour when the moon comes forth to bathe in a sky pure as the gaze of the good gods and soft as the breath of the goddesses." Awakened like Bergeret by stones crashing through his library window, an oversensitive type will turn back to his books, longing, at least momentarily, for the hermit's life which will remove him definitely from the incongruities of a world not made for romanticists.

So Bonnard is transformed into Bergeret, who,



despite his cult of ataraxy, reveals a latent capacity for emotion—the romantic sensitiveness—in his praise of Irony and Pity. But as life wanes, alas!—one gets used to living, learns to love life, to love it even in its ugliness, like the atheist in *La chemise*. “Moi, j’aime la vie, la vie de cette terre, la vie telle qu’elle est, la chienne de vie.” So the mature Anatole France attains the calm Epicureanism of Doctor Trublet and Brotteaux des Ilettes, in whom imagination has subsided in a measure, philosophers grown more serene with age, no longer lamenting Bergeret’s dream-villa, but content to gather uncomplaining the crumbs of beauty and pleasure life offers by the way.

In fine, one cannot help thinking that Anatole France looked into the mirror when he drew Dechartre in *Le Lys rouge*. Like the artist, he too is “a restless mobile spirit, egotistic and passionate, eager to give himself, prompt to withdraw, loving himself generously in all the beauty which he finds in the world.” He too is one who lives for self, for the pleasures his intellect and his senses and his temperament can give. This makes him an artist, and this gives him the defects of the artist. “There are people who are masters of their impressions, but I cannot imitate them.” So he is the victim of his qualities, unable to co-ordinate or discipline either intellect or imagination. “I have never been a real observer, for the observer must have a system

to guide him, and I have no system at all. The observer directs his vision; the spectator lets himself be led by his eyes."

The results of this yielding to self are shown in his art. All his longer stories are formless: lack of true constructive ability is the real basis of his preference for the tale. Unable to force his talents or co-ordinate them, he requires twenty years to finish his one piece of serious scholarship. But discipline would have curbed that universal curiosity which is his life's chief interest; the dilettante cannot subordinate his talents, the skeptic can build no system save the skepticism which indulgently tolerates them all.

A man of moods, living after his moods, his subjectivity will always limit his creative imagination. His best characters—the only truly living characters of his novels—are invariably "portraits of the artist." Aside from that, he can only draw directly from life—as he did with Choulette—or sketch a figure cleverly characterized by the externals which impress his sympathy or his impassive hate. Rather significant, in this connection, is his denial of the creative imagination: "All our ideas come to us from the senses, and imagination consists, not in creating, but in assembling ideas." So, too, he defends plagiarism and makes creation a matter of style: "Ideas belong to everybody, but as a thought has no value save through its form, to give a new

form to an old thought is art in its entirety and the only creation possible to humanity."

Yet it would be easy to push this criticism too far. The originality of Anatole France is to depict his multiple self, to mold figures into which he can breathe his own ideas, and to make them of enduring metal rather than the usual sawdust or straw. Subjective portraits as they are, Sylvestre Bonnard and the genial Abbé, Professor Bergeret and Trublet and Brotteaux are enough to compensate for this creative deficiency, which is supplemented by a memory that makes his brain the sum of all he has ever been. For Anatole France lives in his own past as he lives in the past of humanity.

To impose no rein upon imagination or intellect, to avoid discipline and co-ordination of one's talents to a single end, to follow the self where it listeth, is the mark of the true Epicurean. "Let us not listen to the priests who teach the excellence of suffering," he tells an audience *in propria persona*, "for it is joy which is good . . . Let us not fear joy, and when a beautiful thing or a smiling thought offers us pleasure, let us not refuse it." Needless to cite proof: indications of his pagan sensuousness are frequent enough throughout his work, particularly in the growing license of the later books. That fact alone shows the breakdown of pure hedonism as an intellectual ideal. But, on the other hand,

here we find the very quality which, at its best and under control, creates his finest prose: it is this sensuous vibrancy that gives such an atmospheric afterglow to his pages, which stir the senses and trouble the soul like the poignantly fleeting beauty of a sunset sky. It is a glamor we can only feel, created by one who "would rather feel than understand."

An Epicurean gifted with an active mind, a restless soul ever seeking the unknown, will of course enjoy a longer cycle of pleasures than a mere sensual hedonist. "One wearies of everything except the joys of comprehending." But "books trouble restless souls," and though comprehension remains a pleasure in the long ranges of the mind, when it comes home again to self its joys are turned to torment. "Our ignorance of our own *raison d'être* must always be a source of melancholy and disgust." When youth is gone and self-centered intellect alone remains, dissolving that hope and illusion which is the spiritual basis of life, when the bitter skeptic has definitely put down the poet and the idealist, he must reaffirm himself by action, and the cloistered Epicurean knows no form of action but writing. Even the skeptic must write—write to regain an illusion for living. He may not know whether the world exists, but as an artist he does know that his art exists absolutely. We must all believe: the very gymnosophist, sitting in mud on the

Ganges banks, hugs a negative belief beneath his squalid immobility. We must believe and *act*, or die: "Whatever be our philosophic doubts, we are forced to act in life as if we had no doubts at all."

So, like the homunculus of Faust, the romantic Pyrrhonist yields to life's imperative call. He turns to his desk, and there makes a stand against the flux of appearances which Heraclitus first taught by the Ionian sea. He expresses himself, like all of us; and it is well perhaps that this impulse to self-expression should be instinctive and blind. He may excuse his inconsistency by saying, like Anatole France, that "it is better to speak of beautiful things than not to speak at all," but at heart he knows that he is only the blind instrument of the Light that is in him, the slave of a Word that must be made flesh for the salvation of his soul.

And thus, even in his cloister, the artist like the philosopher justifies his existence to the world. He is judged by his results. If the man of stronger passion and simpler mind—the man of action—finds his self-expression in fighting the universe without, his broader vision and more timorous judgment will turn him from that unequal struggle with an age of low ideals, to find a field of action in the universe within. He will live, not in life but in books, that agreeable dilution of life, which even a world of "service" may well allow to those who distil honey for its delight. And if, as with Anatole

France, his is too vital a temperament to stay there forever, if finally the same nervous sensitiveness which had led him to art brings him out of his study in generous pity for the oppressed, we must sympathize with him returning in disillusion. Not that such a one needs it: he still has, to console him behind his study doors, the intellectual life, the much-needed critical spirit which alone will make the liberty of our children's world. And some day, reviewing his work and noting in his later loss of poise the brand of the conflict, posterity will regret that Anatole France did not stay in his library, content to remain one of those "for whom the universe is only ink and paper," comforted by the fact that ink and paper and broken marble is all that is left of those who laid the foundations of modern Europe in the little Attic town.

Of course, such a philosophy has its limitations. After all, the beauty of art is a symbolic beauty. Its larger interest lies in its significance: the masterpiece crystallizes a type of the human spirit arrested at a vital stage. In the calm of the Greek marbles, in the smile of Mona Lisa, in the patient niggling realism of the Dutch school, a whole age is revealed, a phase of humanity caught and fixed for all generations to come. What is real in the contrast between Watteau's suavity and Millet's rude force is the more definite contrast sensed in the age and the people, in the silent multitudes behind the art-

ists. This matrix, this mass of human flesh, voiceless and inert, forgotten unless it find immortality in such a masterpiece, must always be the critic's background: he paints a portrait, but if chosen rightly, the face sums up the spirit of the age.

Are we justified in finding such a type in Anatole France? Certainly not, if in his work he sought a literal reflection of his larger background, a panorama of life such as is revealed in the monumental creation of a Balzac. To be sure, something of this kind of realism may be found in *Histoire contemporaine* and others of his modern novels. But from a philosophic standpoint, these are far less significant than *Thaïs* or the tales, which, under the mask of history, present symbolically a spiritual and intellectual portrait of the later nineteenth century in France.

Anatole France typifies his age in its dominant interest, the historical spirit. Discovered by Walter Scott, developed by Romantics eager to follow imagination in a flight from reality—fortified, in Flaubert and his school, by archæology and psychology, the great modern study finds in this writer a characteristic devotee. His keen perception of human identity beneath all the manifold differences of time and place teaches him that man's duty is to rewrite history; yet, despite an increasing realism, he is no dupe of the pseudo-scientific school of historians. To the end he remains a critic

and an artist, recreating the past through insight and imagination.

He typifies the excessive individualism of this age of democracy. Even in his conservative days he is ardently personal: he cannot keep self out of his creation. Not merely subjective, like the Romanticists, from whom he differs by a greater intellectual reserve, he carries subjectivity into the things of the intellect, and to justify the dilettantism of his attitude, exalts it finally into a philosophy. Hence his skepticism, eager to show the relativity of other men's realities, rising under attack to a devotion toward philosophic nihilism which is a devotion to his own form of dialectic. Barring a few years of pragmatism, this is his dominant attitude: from first to last he is an intellectual anarch, reducing all things to his measure: and in his reaction against all absolutist formulas he has become a large figure in the new philosophy of Humanism.

His pragmatic period, and indeed his whole later evolution, reflect our modern humanitarian and socialistic interests. A corollary of his subjectivity, confessedly grounded upon an epicurean sensitiveness to pain, this social pity is still real enough to lead him into thorny paths for the sake of justice. Here at least his idealism overrides the skeptic. For as he says, "if the object for which one sacrifices oneself is an illusion, self-sacrifice is none the less a reality, and that reality is the most splendid



adornment that man can put upon his moral nakedness." And though, to him, "earth is only a grain of sand in an infinite desert of celestial worlds," none the less he adds: "But if men suffer only upon earth, it is greater than all the rest of the universe. . . . It is everything and the rest is nothing at all."

How different this attitude from the Romantic contempt of ordinary humanity, from that hatred of the bourgeois which all his life held Flaubert aloof in the artist's aristocratic pride. Yet Anatole France is one with Flaubert in his cult of art. He too has that devotion to style, born of Romantic example and grown into a religion with the Parnassian poets and the author of *Salammbô*. Primarily a stylist, even his reaction against *Le Parnasse*, his rejection of their "splendid" diction for a classical simplicity, is still a devotion to form, a devotion whose labors only a stylist can fully understand. To the end he remains in spirit a Parnassian, polishing his seemingly artless phrases until all trace of effort or workmanship is filed away. So for him there is no unconscious simplicity. "A good style is like yonder beam of light, which owes its pure brilliance to the intimate combination of the seven colors which compose it. A simple style is like white light: it is complex, but it does not seem so. In language true simplicity is only apparent, and springs merely from the fine

co-ordination and sovereign blending of its several parts."

A conscious artist, he is ever seeking a greater perfection. Remodeling *Sylvestre Bonnard* in 1900, he ponders every phrase and particle in his effort to improve its delicate rhythm. His work has ripened from the beginning, until in *Histoire contemporaine* its finish and contexture are rich enough to dispense with constructive unity. But even *Le mannequin d'osier* is not so fine as the art of *Les dieux ont soif*, so carefully polished, so delicately evasive of all that is tedious or obvious. Some of its episodes may be open to criticism, but the style is perfection itself.

The charm of these pages is indeed hard to analyze. Always one feels the intellectual qualities underneath, the philosophy, the humor. It is the charm of ironical detachment, the mask so often adopted by the disillusioned idealist. It is a universal irony—seen not merely in the art of inverted statement which Coignard and Bergeret take from Voltaire; it is also the impassive irony of Flaubert, recounting in cold moderation abuses which clamor for emotional treatment, for the lash of sarcasm or indignation. And with all this it is the irony of Renan, those indefinable overtones of an ironic temperament, divided between imagination and intellect. Poised condor-like over a serio-comic

universe, this fantastic humor seizes upon contrasts that startle or appall.

If primarily intellectual, his charm is also due to qualities which belong to the poet as well as the philosopher. The art of Anatole France is a product of his imagination, his taste, and his musical sense. Symbolic of his whole creation is his statement concerning the ballad that first revealed to him the virtue of poetry: "In my prose will be found the *disjecta membra* of the poet." This is plain enough when his work is read aloud. Only thus can one realize the flexibility of his diction, which runs the whole gamut of melodic quality without ever losing its purity or its power to express his changing moods: a flexibility that gives the reader all the delicacy of the impression, in a music that might seem stolen from the very flute of Pan.

Yet with all his sensuousness he rarely falls into stylistic exaggeration. His taste may break down as regards matter, but never in his manner or form. It is this which keeps him from the bathos so common in æsthetic or rhythmic prose—taste and an intellectuality which the sensation never quite obscures. They save him from that pitfall of French writers, rhetorical emphasis—from that love of sonorous or dramatic effect which makes the theater the dream of every literary Gaul. "*En tous les genres, il nous faut des Marseillaises.*" Taste turns

him from this to the poetry that life itself distils, perceptible only to those whose ears are not filled by noise alone. An instinctive tact seems to have led him naturally to the Greeks, rather than to the oratorical Romans so dear to French classicism, and when his old Ciceronian professor of rhetoric criticized him on this point, suggesting that he read "the complete works of Casimir Delavigne," he felt already that he had found something better. "Sophocles had given me a certain bent which I could not undo." And all through his life that same taste has kept his genius from the contamination of northern literatures, making him the most truly classical of all the moderns. Alone among contemporaries, Anatole France has grafted the living flower of Hellas upon the Gallo-Latin logic of form.

"You are the genius of Greece made French," said Alfred Croiset in his memorial tribute to Anatole France. "You have taken from Greece her gift of subtle dialectic, of smiling irony, of words which seem endowed with wings, of poetry delicate yet definite and full of luminous reason; and you have shed upon that Greek beauty the grace of the Ile-de-France, the grace which invests her familiar landscapes, and which also lends its beauty to the style of our dearest writers, those who are most delightfully French."

Greek, yet subtly national, this is why Anatole

France has taken his place among the great French classics. This is why he must remain a classic. For if literature is the least durable of all the arts, dependent as it is upon words and metaphors which never cease to change, he alone in his generation has chosen the simplicity that suffers least from time. In the last thirty years, a new literature and a new hope have succeeded the pessimism consequent upon 1870, and when the literary anarchy of the end of the century has passed like a cloud in the cold, bright, windswept dawn of tomorrow, we shall still remember Anatole France. A monument of that discouraged era, when life itself forced the artist into the esoteric, his books will best recall the delicate age which found its object in an epicurean cult of art and self. For he alone has avoided the formal dangers of its romantic subjectivity, building not in agate nor in porphyry, but in the cool yet glowing marbles of the Greeks.

A new age is upon us. The cult of the self—"that pearl of degeneration" as a Socialist poet calls it—will probably perish. But art will not perish; and in art, we know, works without grace are of no avail. We shall return to Anatole France some day, come back to his work as the traveler returns to Athens, for the beauty that is hers. For his finest pages will not die, as long as there are books to read and men to read them.



## CHRONOLOGY OF THE PRINCIPAL WORKS OF ANATOLE FRANCE

1844—1924

- 1868     *Alfred de Vigny, étude*  
1873     *Les Poèmes dorés*  
1874     *Racine*, preface to *Œuvres* (the first of a series  
          from which he selected the essays of *Génie*  
          *latin*)  
1876     *Les Noces corinthiennes*  
1879     *Lucile de Chateaubriand, étude*  
          *Jocaste et le Chat maigre*  
1881     *Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard*  
1882     *Les Désirs de Jean Servien*  
1883     *Abeille*  
1885     *Le Livre de mon ami*  
1887     *Nos Enfants*  
1888-92 *La Vie littéraire*, 4 volumes  
1889     *Balthazar*  
1891     *Thaïs*  
1892     *L'Etui de nacre*  
1893     *La Rôtisserie de la reine Pédauque*  
          *Les Opinions de M. Jérôme Coignard*

- 1894 *Le Lys rouge*
- 1895 *Le Jardin d'Epicure*  
*Le Puits de Sainte-Claire*
- 1897 *Discours de réception*  
*Le Mannequin d'osier*  
*L'Orme du mail*  
*Pages choisies* (G. Lanson, edit.)
- 1898 *Au petit bonheur, proverbe dramatique*  
*La Leçon bien apprise*
- 1899 *L'Anneau d'améthyste*  
*Pierre Nozière*
- 1900 *Clio*  
*Filles et garçons*
- 1901 *Monsieur Bergeret à Paris*  
*L'affaire Grainquebille*
- 1902 *Opinions sociales*
- 1903 *Histoire comique*
- 1904 *Grainquebille, Putois, Riquet, etc.*
- 1905 *L'Eglise et la République*  
*Sur la pierre blanche*
- 1906 *Vers les temps meilleurs*
- 1908 *L'Ile des Pingouins*  
*La Vie de Jeanne d'Arc*  
*Les Contes de Jacques Tournebroche*
- 1909 *Les sept femmes de la Barbe-Bleue, etc.*
- 1910 *Aux étudiants, discours*

- 1912    *Les Dieux ont soif*  
         *La comédie de celui qui épousa une femme*  
         *muette*
- 1913    *Génie latin*
- 1914    *La Révolte des anges*
- 1915    *Sur la voie glorieuse*
- 1916    *Ce que disent nos Morts*
- 1918    *Le Petit Pierre*
- 1922    *La Vie en fleur*
- 1925    *Dernières pages inédites*







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BOOKS BY  
LEWIS PIAGET SHANKS



*Les Fleurs du Mal:*  
*The Complete Poems of Charles Baudelaire*  
1925 (Out of Print)

*Flaubert's Youth:*  
1821-1845  
1927 (Johns Hopkins Press)

*Baudelaire:*  
*Flesh and Spirit*  
1930

*Baudelaire:*  
*Flowers of Evil*  
1931 (in English verse)







